

# Guest Editorial

## Evangelism through Bridge-building

When ministers hear the term 'bridge-building', they usually think of the vast gap between the biblical author's culture on the one hand and the congregation's culture on the other hand. One of the preacher's tasks is to stand between those two worlds of the 'then and there' and the 'here and now' and to build a bridge between, for example, Jerusalem in the 1st century and Edinburgh today. That is no easy task. It's hard to 'distance' oneself from one's own contemporary scene and thought patterns in order to get as close as possible to the mores and thinking of those who wrote Scripture.

To make the task more difficult, the more effectively the preacher succeeds in travelling back to 1st century Jerusalem, the more complex becomes the task of crossing back over to Edinburgh and our contemporary thinking of the 21st century. All too often we find our assumed understanding of the text we're studying has been demolished and to our dismay and confusion we

discover we never really understood it properly at all. Such is the hermeneutical challenge for those who seek to expound the Bible!

Evangelism faces a very similar challenge. We have all experienced frustration and despair as we have done our best to share the good news with an increasingly secular society and with lovely people who have absolutely no idea of what the Christian faith is all about. Hearing, they do not hear; listening, they do not perceive; asking questions, they do not understand. It often seems that the more we say the less they learn. Indeed, those to whom we 'witness' end up even further from Christ than before we started.

So is there a way forward? Certainly there is. More, there are many ways forward, but in this editorial I want to address just one: 'bridge-building' by a local congregation resolved to share Christ with those living on the church's doorstep.

May I take an example of a sustained outreach to young families in the im-

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## *The church's welcome to any who might come must be 'double' in this sense: a comfortable, suitable meeting place plus a genuine smile and offer of friendship*

aginary parish of Garthside West where Tim Trueman has been recently ordained and inducted. The busy little town of Garthside already has a Playgroup and Mums & Tots run by the local authority. However, there is a small waiting list for both so it is clear there will be no offence if further provision is made.

### **A double warm welcome**

It must be said at once that the church's welcome to any who might come must be 'double' in this sense: a comfortable, suitable meeting place plus a genuine smile and offer of friendship. I have written at length in an earlier editorial about church halls<sup>1</sup> so I will not repeat myself. Sufficient to say that people are accustomed to a relaxed homely atmosphere, a carpeted room with comfortable chairs, bright curtains on the windows, pictures on the walls and spotlessly clean toilets with freshly laundered towels. It doesn't matter how warm the human welcome is if the room is fusty, the chairs uncomfortable, the upholstery torn, the walls dirty and bare, the windows grubby, the toilets smelly, a dirty hand towel hung on a bent nail behind a door with peeling paint, and the toilet paper sitting on a cold stone floor because the holder is broken. (It's best to meet in church premises and not in one of the mothers' homes; local jealousies and rivalries can easily surface.)

The smile and friendship offered – the second aspect of this 'double' welcome – is also vitally important. Strangers will not be fooled by phony greetings. Debbie, Sheila and Maureen are the first hesitant mothers to bring their tots to this new Garthside West venture, which has been advertised on the local surgery

notice board. They will not be fooled by slushy smiles, far less by grudging nods, from those who only see these young women as potential 'members'. 'Tut-tuts' can be offensive. The welcome must be absolutely genuine, arising from a real love and concern for them, because Christ's love and concern provide the main spring of the motivation.

Garthside West is both fortunate and blessed in having one person who has a real vision for the new Mums & Tots. Meet Elaine. Her children are at school, the older girl at the local secondary and the younger boy at the local primary school. Elaine has a firm, sincere Christian faith. She has lived in Garthside all her life and has been longing for an opportunity to share her faith. With the new ministry at last the opportunity has come, now Tim has suggested this outreach. For years, she has prayed for her home town. How will she cope running the new venture?

Let me suggest that Elaine needs to know clearly the way forward. There are several steps which must be taken in turn. There are a few pitfalls to be avoided as well.

### **Efficient management**

Step one: the Mums & Tots must be run smoothly and well. The accommodation must always be open on time, be well-heated and clean, ready to receive those who come. The equipment Elaine needs to obtain (toys, trikes etc.), must be laid out attractively. The refreshments that will be served – tea, coffee, orange juice, biscuits – should be in the charge of a friendly, capable helper. Elaine herself needs to be free to chat with the young mothers who come.

It may be that some area in the accommodation should also be set apart for those who want a cigarette, but since so many public areas nowadays are 'non-smoking zones', it's possible that no unnecessary offence will be caused by asking those who come not to smoke. That issue needs a decision before Elaine is caught out when a mother unexpectedly 'lights up'.

Elaine will also have to have the group registered with the Social Services. The official procedures to be gone through should not be seen as unwanted hassle. The social worker from the local authority will be asking for no more than the legislation requires.

### **Building relationships**

Step two: the success of the entire venture is ultimately going to depend on Elaine and her helper(s) forming strong, genuine friendships with those who come. As has already been said, that will be entirely dependent on the reality of their personal concern for them. That indefinable 'extra' which a Christian atmosphere can have is going to be absolutely crucial. Grace, patience, understanding, gentleness, thoughtfulness and, above all, love must be *unconsciously* manifest.

Now it's possible Elaine may be tempted to jump in quickly with 'Christian witness'. If she did that I'm not sure any of her clients would object. After all, the Mums & Tots is meeting in church premises and people are entitled to their opinions. Therefore, if each session was concluded with a 'Bible slot' – a reading, comment and prayer – it is unlikely any of the mothers would be inhibited from coming back.

But I suspect that her minister will wisely advise her against any 'Bible slot' and I would agree with him. Such methods of sharing the Christian faith are extremely limited in their value. Indeed, after some years of experience, I have the strongest doubt as to their effectiveness. Let me explain why.

Most of these young women will be familiar (maybe without realising it)

with New Age thinking. If Elaine were to use words and phrases such as 'the new birth, the Spirit, power, peace, life, joy, faith, trust', most of her listeners would have in their minds completely different connotations for such terms. Elaine would be talking past them. They would nod and agree, but have something quite different in their thinking from what the Bible ever intended. So far better for step two to be Elaine sticking to straightforward caring and understanding and building of friendships.

### **Sowing the seed**

The Mums & Tots has run for a year, and the second session is about to begin. The numbers have increased from three to twelve. The group has gelled well and there is the promise of several new members. What should be Elaine's next move?

Step three: she needs to begin a Bible Study Group. The method of sharing the faith which Jesus taught us is perfectly plain: Listen! *A farmer went out to sow his seed... Don't you understand this parable? The farmer sows the word...* (Mark 4:3, 13). Nothing will grow unless something is sown! And the something which must be sown is the word of God.

I read recently that the only churches which are breaking new ground in today's society are those which have learned to sow the seed of the word in new ground. Liberal churches which have lost faith in the word of God have nothing to sow. That is not to say they don't have some influence: as the caption commented below a cartoon of a fisherman tramping home with an empty bag after a futile day at the river, 'He may not have caught any fish, but at least he influenced some!' What use is that?

### **Complete honesty**

How does one begin a Bible Study with young women who have never darkened the front door of a church in their lives and whose minds have imbibed New Age thinking together with a whole mass of vague impressions left by videos and movies? The

## ***How does one begin a Bible Study with young women who have never darkened the front door of a church in their lives and whose minds have imbibed New Age thinking together with a whole mass of vague impressions left by videos and movies?***

answer is that Elaine must be completely honest. She needs to be up front.

A personal approach to join the Bible Study will be needed to *each* mother. A general announcement to all or a notice on the wall is useless unless it is backed up by that personal, face to face invitation. Each mother needs to be invited individually to a Bible Study 'for those who know nothing about the Bible but would like to learn a little'. The purpose must be made crystal clear: this new group is to learn something of what the Bible is saying and it's for those who know nothing and probably do not even have a Bible in the house, let alone have ever opened one.

The Bible Study Group (Elaine might think up an attractive name for the new group) will meet at a suitable time for exactly one hour – not a minute longer – and a creche will be provided which will be run by experienced mothers whose children are much older. After one hour of study, there will be a cup of tea for those who have time to stay and chat. Elaine guesses (rightly) that fellowship will begin to develop on an entirely new level as the Bible's message begins to enter the hearts of her young mothers.

### **What material to use?**

Tim has suggested writing his own study notes for Elaine to use, but she knows of a system produced a few years ago which she thinks may be ideally suited. Anyway, her minister has enough work to do so why re-invent the wheel? The plan is to issue each

member of the new group with Notes for a course which will last for ten weeks (the end of September to the first week in December). At the first group meeting Elaine will clearly explain the format.

Its structure is unusual. They will begin with the *Letter of James*. Each week, there will be a passage from *James* for study and each day there will be one question about a small section of that passage. The group members will keep a note book for their answers to questions; other Bible references will be in the Notes to give them clues. When the group meets, discussion will focus on the answers they have themselves given to each of the seven questions for that week.<sup>2</sup> Elaine also assured them no one will be asked to pray or read aloud unless they choose to do so.

### **Leading a group**

An important point must be made which Elaine will have to grasp for herself. It is that no answer from one of her group members must be slapped down as 'wrong'. She must think, not in mechanical terms of 'right' or 'wrong' answers, but in agricultural terms of looking for the first green shoot appearing through the soil of the understanding.

It is not that – after the postmodern fashion – every answer will be right! That is more or less the logical outcome of the 'new hermeneutic' which has been spawned by pluralism and which is rapidly becoming part and parcel of 21st century thinking. Rather is it that group members must

be encouraged to keep searching, keep looking, keeping reading other verses of Scripture to enable them to tune in to the Bible's wavelength.

So Elaine must work carefully, with sympathy and empathy. Any mature Christian she invites to sit in on the studies must not be of a dogmatic temperament, thinking herself to be there to put these young women 'right'. The attitude must be one of helpfulness as they seek to guide their new friends into understanding the word of God.

### **Anticipating growth**

Elaine must not be discouraged if the Bible Study Group gets off to a slow start. Not all those mothers who agree to come will complete the first ten

you lead on your own. That will take at least three separate ten-week courses.

### **Seeker friendly services**

The time will come when some of the mothers from the study groups will start attending church. Her minister will have kept in close touch. He may even have been invited to an extra session of the group to answer difficult questions the girls have had which Elaine herself had struggled with. He will be alert to the possibility of them beginning to appear on Sundays.

He will therefore keep his language simple and clear. His prayers will be simple and explicit, pitched at about the level of Junior Bible Class pupils; likewise his sermons. After all, he is

This is why in our contemporary society it is vital to have an appropriate strategy for outreach. The Gospel hasn't changed, neither has the need of the human heart nor the power of the Spirit to bring new life. The challenge is for each congregation to think carefully about opportunities which may be there, right on the door-step. Once those opportunities have been identified, a plan of action must be worked on. There will always be some waiting to hear of Christ, some in whom the Spirit can do his silent work of grace. It is these who will become effective witnesses. They are better able to relate to others than members who have been Christians for years and who know little of the pagan culture in which unbelievers have been brought up.

Oh for more congregations to have the courage, using timeless biblical principles, to launch out into patient, careful 'bridge-building'. After all, if you read Eugene Peterson in this Journal on 'Jesus the Subversive' you'll see that was the way the Master went. Must not the servant tread it still?

## ***those who already attend need theological jargon breaking down into bite-sized chunks***

week course. But after the Christmas and New Year break, she must persevere and start another ten week course, always inviting others to join. And others will join. As her first members begin to grasp something of God's revelation to us in Christ, they will feel confident about inviting their own friends. The group will grow!

However, it's best if one group does not exceed about twelve members. When numbers reach thirteen or fourteen, Elaine may have to form a second group to meet at another suitable time, since participation by those attending can be inhibited if the group is too large and thus the learning process can slow down. This means Elaine will have to be thinking all the time of training mothers from her group to provide new leaders, as the number of groups slowly multiplies. It will possibly take up to two years to train a leader. The formula itself is simple; using it is far from easy: you watch me leading, then I watch you leading, then

only in the early days of a new ministry and he is assuming those who already attend need theological jargon breaking down into bite-sized chunks. It would be helpful to be able to catch a prophetic glimpse a few years hence to see just how far Elaine's first, firmly church-based outreach managed to go. While one cannot speculate, I am able to write with complete truthfulness that I have outlined above the method and pattern used in recent years in at least one Scottish congregation. I can report that after seven years the 'Elaine' of that church had several score of women attending five different groups. Four of her 'originals' had become group leaders. The pastoral work involved had become almost a full-time job. The elders of that same congregation estimated that the numbers of those attending worship on the Lord's Day had not just increased significantly, but that the average age had fallen by twenty years.

1 RJCM, Vol.5.2, Winter 1998

2 This material is called *Geared for Growth* and is obtainable from Margaret Halley, 10 Douglas Drive, Newton Mearns, Glasgow G77 6HR. Tel: (0141) 639 8695 or will be available in Christian bookshops early summer.

# The Jesus Papyri

Arthur Bentley-Taylor, Workington

## Dating of the Jesus Papyrus

**T**he Magdalen Papyri or 'Jesus Papyrus' were obtained in Egypt by an Anglican clergyman, Charles Bousfield Huleatt, some time between 1890 and 1893 while he was serving there as a chaplain. Huleatt sent his find to Magdalen College in 1901. The papyri consist of 3 fragments, 4.1cm by 1.2 cm; 1.6cm by 1.6 cm, and 4.1cm by 1.3 cm, each with the Greek script of Matthew 26 written on both sides. There were 15-16 letters to a line and 35-36 lines to a column and two columns to a side. Thus it can be readily computed that Matthew's Gospel would have comprised about 150 pages. At the time, Huleatt suggested a 3rd century date for his papyri.

In the early 20th century it was assumed the Gospels, originally written on papyrus scrolls, were only copied onto papyrus codex (books with writing on both sides) in the imperial age. The shift from scroll to codex was assumed to have taken place during the second half of the 3rd century. So when Arthur Hunt of Magdalen examined Huleatt's fragments, he assigned them to the 4th century. They were displayed in a cabinet in the Old Library in an inaccessible attic room.

It was not until 1953 that the British papyrologist Colin H Roberts re-dated the 'Jesus Papyrus' to late 2nd century, connecting it to 2 scraps of papyri kept in Barcelona known as P67. There appeared to be no doubt that the Magdalen Papyrus of Matthew 26 and Barcelona Papyrus, P67, of Matthew 3 and 5, were originally part of the same complete Gospel codex.

In February 1994, a German scientist and papyrologist, Carsten Peter Thiede, Director of the Institute for Basic Epistemological Research in Paderborn, was in Oxford with his English wife for a family celebration. Out of curiosity, he asked to see the St Matthew Papyrus, and was greatly intrigued by the papyrus labelled 'P. Magdalen Greek 17/P64'.

### Matthew written in AD50?

Thiede was convinced it was much older than the late 2nd century and argued for a date about AD50! He based his case on physical evidence rather than on literary theory or historical supposition. He wrote, 'It means the people in the story must have been around when this was being written. It means they were there.' He believed the manuscript to be the oldest extant fragment of the Gospels. Previously the oldest was thought to be the minuscule century fragment of St

John's Gospel in the John Rylands Library in Manchester, P52.

On Christmas Eve 1994, the Times reported Peter Thiede's claim: 'A papyrus believed to be the oldest extant fragment of the NT has been found in an Oxford library. It provides the first material evidence that the Gospel according to St Matthew is an eyewitness account written by contemporaries of Christ.'

### A cynical reception by scholars

At first scholars reacted negatively. Enoch Powell dismissed the claim as unfounded and arrogant. In 1995, Graham Stanton, Professor of NT Studies at King's College, London, wrote *Gospel Truth?* to refute it. But some other scholars commended Thiede's approach and began to discuss the implications of the discovery.

The assumption of much 20th century speculative scholarship has been that the Gospels are profoundly unreliable. Rudolf Bultmann, 1884-1976, had written, 'I am of the opinion that we can know practically nothing about Jesus' life and personality.' He reckoned the Gospels were not historical narratives but collections of traditional 'forms' that evolved in the life and worship of early Christian communities and were designed to meet their needs. He regarded the Gospels not as

eyewitness accounts but as primitive ecclesiastical manuals.

### Three objections

Scholars raised three objections to Thiede's early dating of the Magdalen Papyrus. The *first objection* was that Matthew's Gospel had not been written at the time! The consensus among scholars had been that Mark was written in about AD70, Matthew and Luke about AD80, John about AD100. They reasoned (a) the Gospels were not written down until the early Church had given up hope of Christ's immediate return, (b) the deity of Jesus was a late addition, made long after the destruction of Jerusalem in AD70, (c) Jesus' prophecy of the destruction of the Temple must have been written after the event, (d) Jesus could not have foreseen the development of the church as an administrative institution, as Matthew 16:18 implies.

These assumptions were based on archaeological evidence together with literary criticism, sociology and anthropology. But little use had been made of the science of papyrology.

The *second objection*: the style of writing was a late style. The Jesus Papyrus is classified as a 'biblical uncial' (capitals) normally dated between the 3rd and 8th century AD. But recent discoveries have provided invaluable materials for comparison. There are dateable texts with fixed end-dates. *The Dead Sea Scrolls* from Qumran, discovered 1947-1955, are dateable before AD68 when the settlement was overrun by the 10th Roman Legion 'Fretensis'. Texts from Herculaneum and Pompeii, destroyed by volcanic eruption in AD79, can be no younger. The end date for texts from Masada is AD73-AD77.

A very credible conclusion from the study of this comparative material<sup>1</sup> is that the Magdalen Papyrus – self-evidently no earlier than AD30 – possibly belongs to the middle of the 1st century 'with a distinct preference towards a slightly earlier date', i.e. AD50 or even earlier! Obviously Matthew's original Scroll must have predated the Jesus Papyrus by a few years!

## *Thiede postulates that Mark's Gospel, written in Rome, might have reached Qumran from Rome within a fortnight*

A *third objection*: Huleatt found the Magdalen Papyrus in Egypt so it must be of Egyptian origin, and there were no Christian scribal centres in 1st century Egypt so it cannot be a 1st century papyrus. However this does not take account of the strength of the Jewish community in Alexandria, so large that the communal 'Amens' had to be signalled by waving flags! The community may well have included scribes.

Books were dedicated to wealthy people who were then obliged to pay for their copying and distribution, e.g. Theophilus in Luke & Acts. Such a man could well have had access to the *scriptoria* of the imperial administration. Such a man would also have had access to the *tabellarii*, the postmen of the empire. Anyone using the irregular network of couriers could send packages to distant destinations. The nobility could use the imperial mail which did the job quickly. In good weather, post could be sent from Corinth to Puteoli in Egypt in five days! Or even from Rome to Alexandria in Egypt in 3 days! In 1995, wine jars from Rome, ordered by Herod, were found at Masada, destroyed in AD73. Manuscripts copied anywhere could well be sent all over the Empire!

If Matthew's Gospel was written (as has been suggested) in Syrian Antioch, modern Antakia in Turkey, 500 miles north of Jerusalem, on a regular trade route, any book could easily have reached Jerusalem in a week! A copy could have reached Egypt within a few weeks! Thiede postulates that Mark's Gospel, written in Rome, might have reached Qumran from Rome within a fortnight.

## *A striking characteristic of the Jesus Papyrus is the use of nomina sacra, holy names, for Lord and Jesus*

### **The Cultural Background**

Jewish society in first century Palestine was multilingual and multicultural. Hebrew was used in both synagogue and Temple. Aramaic was the everyday language. Greek was the language of culture. Latin was increasingly in use. In the cities plays were performed in Greek for the general population. Between AD37 and AD67 no coin with Hebrew or Aramaic inscription was allowed into Palestine or minted there. The text on all coins was Greek with a few Latin exceptions.

Jesus spoke Aramaic. He read Hebrew in the synagogue. He spoke with a woman in Greek (Mark 7:26) and discussed a Greek inscription (Mark 12:13-17). He used the Greek word for an actor, *hypocrite*, of the Pharisees. Paul was able to switch between Greek and Aramaic (Acts 21:37). The first Christians were not uneducated simpletons but spoke in more than one language. The Gospel was meant to be equally accessible to the Jewish masses at the Temple, to a Hellenised Jewish king and to a Roman procurator.

### **Amanuenses**

The Apostles used scribes as secretaries or amanuenses. John Mark is called a *hypertes*, helper (Acts 13:5); 'I, Tertius, who am writing this letter...' (Rom. 16:22). Paul added his signature at the end of 1 Corinthians, Galatians, Colossians, 2 Thessalonians and Philemon. Some secretaries may well have used short-hand or *tachygraphy*. It was an obligatory skill for a trained scribe.

Matthew, the former customs official, probably had a working knowledge of tachygraphy. If so, he would have been able to transcribe the Sermon on the Mount verbatim.

However, few New Testament scholars are amenable to the suggestion we have an authentic transcript of the Sermon on the Mount!

### **Abbreviations**

A striking characteristic of the Jesus Papyrus is the use of *nomina sacra*, holy names, for Lord and Jesus. These are abbreviations (shorthand) of Greek words for Lord KS for *kyrios*, Jesus IS for *Iesous*, God THS for *theos*, Spirit PNA for *pneuma*. YHWH is the abbreviated divine name without vowels, the *Tetragrammaton*. Papyrus scrolls do not contain *nomina sacra*. However, codices (books) signal their use by a horizontal line above the abbreviated word.

These abbreviations are deliberate, regular and systematic in codices. No scribe would do such a thing without authorization. In 1979, Colin Roberts suggested that the only two churches with such authority were Jerusalem and Antioch. He also suggested the practice was authorized in Jerusalem before AD70. These abbreviations reflect a theological position for they assert the deity of Christ and have been called 'the embryonic Creed of the first Church.'

### **The science of papyrology-forensic evidence**

Papyrus was manufactured near the delta of the Nile from the stem of an aquatic plant mainly cultivated in Upper Egypt. The finished product was exported all over the Mediterranean basin so that papyrus texts were not confined to Egypt. A papyrus found in Egypt may have been written elsewhere.

The Science of papyrology studies ancient texts written on parchment, vellum, leather, linen, slivers of wood, wax tables and potsherds (*ostraca*), rather than the study of inscriptions on stone and marble. Pliny the Elder, AD23-79, described the production of papyrus sheets. He regarded them as the basis of human civilization. The

oldest Egyptian papyrus is dated 2700BC; the oldest Hebrew papyrus is dated 750BC.

### **Codex or scroll?**

After discovery of a text the papyrologist first must decide what form of literary artifact the fragments belonged to originally. Since the Jesus Papyrus has text on both sides, it was part of a codex rather than a scroll. In classical antiquity, the *scroll* was the common format, with text usually on the inner side only. Rolled up, it protected the writing inside. Sheets of papyrus, parchment or leather were attached as required. The finished scroll was attractive and easy to handle.

The *codex* was practical but untidy. Papyri were folded once or twice as required. Both sides, the smooth recto and rougher verso were used, making it more economical. Letters on the rough side could become less elegant and skin would flake off.

At first, operating within the Jewish community, it was natural and traditional to use the scroll. Jesus read from a scroll of Isaiah in the synagogue of Nazareth. The original New Testament writings were on scrolls. But during the 1st century, Christians increasingly adopted the codex. Among Gentiles, the codex/book was more common and useful. After AD70 with the separation of Christianity and Judaism, the codex was used rather than the Scroll. To indicate a new paragraph, the Magdalen Papyrus has one letter in the margin. The other method was to leave a space or *spatium*.

*Stichometry* involves calculating the average number of letters per line. The Jesus Papyrus with three fragments and text on both sides, has 24 lines all with a regular number of letters, average 16, least 15, most 18. On this basis it is possible to reconstruct the text.

### **Spelling mistakes?**

There is evidence that in Jerusalem a Greek dialect was used. Words usually starting with a Greek 'd' in fact start with a 't'. It could be argued there are spelling mistakes but there are too many consistent examples to sustain

that supposition. This d/t 'shift' is yet further evidence for a pre-AD70 date. Thiede used new electronic stereo microscopes which can divide a piece of paper into 20 layers. They can be used to prove that some marks are ink drops and to uncover letters where the surface has flaked off. Further highly technical arguments based on Qumran scroll evidence are also adduced by Thiede to lend powerful support to his case for the early date of the Jesus Papyrus.

## **The Jesus Papyrus – a closer look**

Fragment 1 contains on the verso Matthew 26:7-8. Fragment 2 on the verso has Matt.26:10. When the complete lines are reconstructed the stichometry of line 1 strongly suggests the Greek word Jesus was abbreviated to IS, which is evidence that it was treated as a holy name, *nomen sacrum*.

Fragment 3 has on the verso Matthew 26:14-15. The verse includes the words, 'Then one of the twelve...' but 'twelve' is not the Greek *dodeka* but the numeric symbol iB (=12). So it reads 'Then one of the iB, Judas Iscariot...'

Fragment 3 on the recto has Matthew 26:22-23. There is a damaged omega followed by what was thought to be an 'm'. This led to the reading that each of the disciples asked Jesus *in turn*, 'Is it I?' We know from other texts that it should be an 'n' giving the reading that each of the disciples asked all together, 'Is it I?'. Using an epifluorescent confocal laser-scanning device which is capable of differentiating between 20 separate micrometer layers of a papyrus manuscript, the confusing dot turned out to be an accidental ink blot with no depth. So Thiede was able to prove the letter is, after all, an 'n'. This means that the papyrus correctly reads the disciples all spoke *at once*, 'Is it I?'

The same fragment with Matthew 26:22-23 on line 2 has another example of a *nomen sacrum*, a holy name.



Kyrie, Lord, is written KE. There had been discussion as to how the line ended. Under the new microscope new writing was discovered at the end of the line and it was proved that the line finishes with a *de*.

Fragment 1 on the recto has Matthew 26:31. The first letter of *autois* in Matt.26:31 is written in the margin indicating a new section. Also the verse contains another *nomen sacrum*, sacred name, with Jesus written as IS. The *humeis* has been left out: with it, the line would have 20 letters and without only 15.

## Conclusion

This study has been largely drawn from two books *The Earliest Gospel Manuscript? The Qumran Fragment 7Q5*, by Carsten Peter Thiede & Matthew D'Ancona (Paternoster 1992) and *The Jesus Papyrus* (Phoenix, 1996) by the same authors. It remains to be seen whether scholars will ultimately accept

the validity of Thiede's and Ancona's claims and painstaking scientific studies. In the past all too often new evidence has come to light which has caused considerable shifts of opinion with consequent embarrassment to those proved to have been seriously mistaken.

It is not that those of us in the Confessing churches and Reformed tradition need such evidence in order to accept the authenticity of the Gospel accounts of the historical Jesus. There is much truth in Augustine's dictum that 'to believe is to understand'. Nevertheless, now that the historicity of Jesus has been largely accepted by scholars (after misleading so many people, Bultmann himself has become 'history!'), it would be ironical if an early date for Matthew was not only demonstrated but widely acknowledged, for it would render obsolete countless books and doctoral studies and would be a startling contemporary example of the New

Testament's bold assertion, 'Let God be true, and every man a liar!'

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> The handwriting in Greek manuscripts of Leviticus found in Cave 4 at Qumran, dated towards the end of the 1st century BC, compares well with the Magdalen & Barcelona Papyri. Some of the individual letters are very similar with letters touching or nearly touching. This is not the case with 2nd century manuscripts. The horizontal and vertical strokes are even, equally thick.

From Qumran Cave 7, similar handwriting styles are found on Fragment 7Q6 and others. Also one of the Greek Scrolls from Nahal Hever, south of Qumran, dated mid-1st century, is very similar to the Magdalen Papyrus. Several examples of Greek text from Masada, dated before AD73 compare closely with the Magdalen Papyrus, especially ostrakon No.784. Further confirmation is found in a papyrus letter found at Oxyrhynchus that dates itself to Nero's 12th year, 65/66 AD.

# Biblical Exposition in

David Searle

**Don Carson quotes a letter he received from a Christian student who had tried to witness to an enquirer who'd come along to a College Christian Union meeting out of a mild curiosity to find out something about Christianity: *I told him Jesus was the solution to his problem. He wondered, 'What problem?' I told him Jesus could forgive his sins. He wondered, 'Why is that necessary?' I told him he could escape the fear of death. He told me that he never really thinks about death. He wasn't trying to be difficult. He was one of the most sincere students I've ever met.***

**T**hat student is typical of millions of people in our western culture today. They have been enculturated in what might be called philosophical pluralism – that is, they don't believe there is any objective truth because they have been brought to regard what one believes as simply cultural. And since we live in a pluralist society with *many* cultures, there are *many* 'truths' which, since they are

*many*, by definition can't be objective or absolute.

## A daunting task

Expository preachers today who are determined faithfully to present the message of the Bible have massive problems to face. As well as preaching in a pluralistic culture, we also preach in a society which has been secularized – religion may be 'privately engaging', but it is 'publicly irrelevant'. More, because of widespread familiarity with New Age ideology, when preachers use terms such as God, Spirit, new birth, power, life, peace, joy, faith, trust – all of which can slot neatly into a New Age framework – the sermon will be misunderstood as using categories which have quite different meanings for the hearers to the meaning the preacher has in mind!

As if all that isn't daunting enough, the vast majority of our nation's population under the age of about 40 have never been taught to think analytically; they go on 'impressions'. For example, they learn from videos rather than books and absorb many of their opinions and ideas from the screen rather than from reasoned argument. They can apparently live easily with contra-

dictory views – there *is* a holy God but cohabitation is okay. Moral responsibility has evaporated somewhere in the murky mists of Freudianism which has taught society to explain behavioural aberrations in quasi-scientific terminology.

No wonder preaching is difficult today in our western culture. No wonder so many people regard the Bible's message as having nothing to say to them. It's not that they oppose it. Tolerance is the cardinal virtue. So as long as the preacher isn't too pointed, too assertive, too bold, they will smile and say, 'It's your right to believe what you believe, and our right to believe what we believe. Only don't expect us to do more than listen to you. We're comfortable with what we have, thank-you!' So which way are we to go?

## Cultural horizons

I am absolutely convinced that expository preaching is by far the best way forward. But note, I said expository *preaching*. That is not the same as giving an exposition. You ask, 'What's the difference between an exposition and expository *preaching*?' The difference is that an exposition will only

# a Missionary Age

give an explanation of the Bible text or passage. Expository *preaching* will do far more. It will not only attempt to show what the text *meant* when it was written – that is explain the original intention of the author. It will also show what the text *means* for today.

As John Stott has so ably expressed it, we preachers stand between two worlds; or as some of the theorists express it, there are two cultural horizons: there is the original author's cultural horizon and there is the cultural horizon of the preacher and those he's addressing. It is bridging that gap which is today's challenge for us. I have five propositions for you, (but please turn first with me to Ephesians 4:17-24).

## We must teach a biblical worldview

Paul's statement in Ephesians 4:17-19 is one of the most devastating in the whole of the Bible. Remember that he too was living in a pluralist society, though one with significant differences to ours today. In Paul's day, the great aim of religion was acceptance by the gods or by the one true God. The key question was how can I satisfy the demands of a higher Being or Deity?

It's in that context we have to understand his phrase *the futility of (the) thinking (of those outside of Christ)*. He doesn't mean that unbelievers cannot compose beautiful music or write fine books or design stately buildings. His theme is acceptance before God, righteousness before God. He is saying that the condition of those who are outside of Christ is one of futility, emptiness. In one of his books, Charles Colson quotes Dorothy Sayers' comment on 'tolerance', that watchword of our postmodern era spawned by pluralism. Sayers wrote: *In the world it is called Tolerance, but in hell it is called Despair... the sin that believes in nothing, cares for nothing, seeks to know nothing, interferes with nothing, lives for nothing, and remains alive because there is nothing for which to die.* I think that is pretty near what Paul is writing about here, only his word is not 'tolerance', it is *futility*.

This is an aspect of the Christian gospel which is capable of some empirical proof. We have the despair of the drug culture, the violence that stalks our streets, the boredom of youth with life, the frustration of successive Home Secretaries who fight losing battles against crime, the ever increasing number of children in care and – in

direct proportion to that – the increasing number of men and women in prison. There is empirical evidence for evil! We all accept that. What isn't so clear to our 21st century Joe Public is that Paul is not simply referring here to the baddies – drug pushers, rapists, paedophiles; he is referring to all.

Having laid down his proposition that outside of Jesus Christ all men and women are 'futile in their thinking' he goes on to state the cause of that tragic condition. Their *minds are darkened*, they are *separated from the life of God* (here 'life' is not *bios* – biological life, but *zoe* – life principle) *because of the ignorance in them through the hardening of their hearts*.

The briefest of comments on each of these phrases. *Darkened in their understanding*: the picture is of some object being hidden from view by an impenetrable cloud. There are days when Arthur's Seat, the highest peak in Holyrood Park here in Edinburgh, cannot be seen because of low dense cloud. You might say to a visitor to the city: there's a view of Arthur's Seat from our home, but when you look, nothing can be seen. Point out the glories of the crucified and risen Christ to someone – even to someone with

two or three university degrees – and you may as well be talking double Dutch – *darkened in their understanding*.

*Separated from the life of God*: this is the effect of the break in fellowship with our Creator caused by our rebellion against him. God had warned our first parents of death if they disobeyed, and so it was that they and all their progeny were separated from God. We may hear his footsteps in the hall from time to time as God's presence breathes through nature and his hand guides history, but God himself we never see or meet face to face – we're *separated*.

*Ignorance in them through the hardening of their hearts*: 'heart' in the Bible, of course, refers to mind, will and emotions – in other words, to our entire personalities. We have become *hardened* to God. I recall as a boy seeing an old plumber 'wiping' a lead joint. He had molten lead in a kind of ladle which he was pouring on to a joint to seal it. The molten metal several times splashed on to his fingers. I would have cried out in pain if that had happened to me. But he never noticed. His hands had become seared and no longer felt the molten lead. So the hearts and consciences of those who do not know God are *hardened* to his standards, his rightful demands, his laws and even his love. No wonder they are possessed by total *ignorance* of God.

Now this is a most careful analysis of the **condition** of men and women today, and its **cause**. But look at the **consequences** of this condition. Verse 19: *Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity with a continual lust for more*. I find that quite awful. Once again, it's empirically verifiable. One only has to read a newspaper, or step inside a newsagent's

or video shop, to see illustrations in abundance of exactly what Paul is writing about. It's the effects of the events of Genesis 3: fellowship between all humanity and our loving Creator totally broken down. It's Act 1, Scene 2, in that drama of human history which unfolds for us the plot-line of the Bible's story. The biblical worldview begins here.

We cannot water this down or fudge it in our preaching. We must learn from Paul's precise and penetrating analysis of the problem of the human heart and we must teach it and preach it with care and application to our contemporary culture. I do not mean shooting our mouths off about sin. I mean analysing the human condition thoughtfully and relevantly, the stealth bomber of your expository preaching getting right under the radar screens of your hearers. We have to work hard at it.

#### We have to teach people to think

After the grim picture painted in verses 17-19, we turn with relief to verse 20: *You however did not come to know Christ that way. Surely you heard of him and were taught in him...* Now this is not necessarily the response many churches are making to the challenge of evangelism today. Certainly, many churches recognize the problems. They see that people are accustomed to be entertained or constantly presented with visual images on the screen. They correctly jalousie that linear thinking is not practised by most people.' So they go for 'seeker-friendly' services.

Don't get me wrong. All our services should be to some extent 'seeker-friendly'. Our members should always be confident about bringing their unconverted friends and neighbours to church, knowing that we will pitch the level empathetically for outsiders. But that doesn't mean that we do little more than entertain, or tickle people's toes with moralistic homilies.

Paul refers to his preaching of the Gospel to *total pagans*, note, as 'teaching'. The word in v.20 translated 'come to know' is *mapheteuo*, to be a

***... analysing the human condition thoughtfully and relevantly, the stealth bomber of your expository preaching getting right under the radar screens of your hearers***

pupil; to teach (*maphetes*, scholar, pupil). He says they had been 'taught'. And so we too must teach. And we must begin by teaching people to think.

Part of my work in my present appointment is to seek to help younger ministers to do this. It hardly needs to be said that this cannot be done overnight. It may take several years to produce a congregation of thinking men and women. Nevertheless, that is what we must work towards. And that will need unrelenting effort on our part to present our people with digestible material which is far more than entertainment or toe-tickling. I know of no other way. Jesus *taught*. The apostles *taught*. The Bible contains a mass of *teaching* – so profound that we still grapple with its complexities. And to be faithful, those who preach must also teach. Word by word, line by line, verse by verse, chapter by chapter, book by book – performing that triple task of explaining what the passage *meant*, what it *means* – building that bridge from the then and there to the here and now – and then *applying* that contemporary meaning to our hearers.

You know and I know that we are like Gandulf and Frodo Baggins and their companions in *Lord of the Rings*, when they stood at that rock face and a fast shut door, not knowing the secret words that could open the door. Facing every preacher is a barrier of sheer rock, hard as iron. There is no magic formula, no incantation, that will make that granite yield. Only by the mysterious, enlightening work of the Holy Spirit will the door yield and the entrance of God's word bring light and understanding. Nevertheless, in that faith and in utter dependence on the Spirit's work, we must teach!

#### We have to declare the facts of the Gospel

This is where we can run into trouble for here we come hard up against the prevailing thought patterns of the day. Your postmodern man or woman will expect you to have opinions. But he or she will regard them as no more than your opinions. You are quite

entitled to them. They are entitled to theirs. And if you appear firm or decided in your opinions, they will quickly ask, 'But what about the Hindus?'

In verse 21, Paul uses an interesting phrase: *in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus*. It's interesting because out of 1200 references to the 2nd Person of the Trinity in the New Testament (apart from the five historical NT books), only 2% use the earthly name of Jesus. I repeat: only 2% out of 1200 references to our Lord Jesus Christ in the New Testament use the name 'Jesus' *simplicitur*. The early church saw the risen Christ as glorified, exalted and at the Father's right hand so they almost invariably gave him a title. So we ask, Why here does Paul not use a title for the Lord, such as 'the Lord', 'the Lord Jesus Christ', 'Christ Jesus', the 'Beloved' etc? Why his earthly name here?

The answer is staring us in the face. It is that he is referring to an historical fact. Very God, in the Person of his Son broke into our four-dimensional world of 'space-time' to live here, minister here, die here and rise again here. This is not some opinion, or hypothesis, or fabricated story with the status of a myth. This really happened. Jesus walked the dusty pathways of Palestine, he sat and taught the people, he healed, he raised the dead, he cast out evil spirits, he commissioned apostles, he yielded himself willingly to death, he rose again the third day leaving behind empty grave clothes.

Notice that Paul speaks of *the truth that is in Jesus*. He speaks of truth. Absolute, objective, verifiable truth. *This he insists upon*. Elsewhere he appeals to more than 500 witnesses who saw for themselves the Risen Lord. John in his 1st letter says that they

***...to be faithful, those who preach must also teach. Word by word, line by line, verse by verse, chapter by chapter, book by book...***

touched him, they handled him, they jostled him in the crowds – he was real flesh and blood – and he was the truth! Pontius Pilate was very postmodern with his question to Jesus, ‘What is truth?’ We must teach the answer Jesus gave him! The facts of the Gospel must be clearly taught as facts.

Recently I read Stephen Hawking’s latest book on cosmology. While I found it mind-bending and in places quite exciting, I was surprised that so much in it is pure theory – even hypothesis, conjecture, not even yet raised to the status of theory. At one point, Hawking says with great honesty that it would take a good student about 200 years of diligent work to produce an equation to prove his particular hypothesis, and then he adds, ‘even then how would we know the student hadn’t made a mistake on page 2 of the calculation!’ I thought it was big of him to admit that! Teach the facts as we have received them: teach *the truth that is in the historical Jesus*.

We have to put ‘self’ in its real  
light

There isn’t time to remind you of the distortions which for some decades have been foisted on to a very receptive, gullible public about the ‘self’. In my thirty two years of pastoral ministry, I found the cause of a high proportion of broken marriages was the assumption of one or both partners that their marriage was there to bring self-fulfillment. Fidelity to promises solemnly made no longer featured in their thinking. Habits of the heart have changed drastically.

But see what Paul has to say about ‘self’. *You were taught to put off your old self which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires...* That is a very disturbing diagnosis requiring very drastic surgery. An old ‘self’, an old nature which is being corrupted. We know about corruption, don’t we? Sleaze and corruption in politics and local government are increasingly common. We know the harmful effects on our computers of some virus which corrupts the hard disk and destroys all our

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files. The ‘old self’ is being corrupted, says Paul.

What about *deceitful desires*? Passions which promise so much if only we yield to them! Powerful inclinations which cannot wait but which must be indulged at once! Do you know John Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress*? In ‘Interpreter’s House’, Christian is shown two children, one called Passion, the other called Patience. Passion refused to wait to satisfy his desires but when given all he demanded soon it turned to dust. Deferring self-gratification is hardly a popular theme today, is it? But those desires deceive – a verb constantly used of the devil himself. They deceive the ‘old self’ which is genetically prone to such deception. We have to teach them about that!

We also have to teach them what repentance means. *You were taught to put off your old self* – the verb, Middle Mood, aorist tense, refers to a resolute act of the will, ongoing in its effects, in turning one’s back decisively and continually on a whole way of life displeasing to our loving, holy God. We have to teach them about that too!

We have to teach the real purpose  
of life

Paul states in verse 23 that believers are being renewed (the participle is Passive indicating this is not something we can do for ourselves but must be done for us) – believers are being renewed in the attitude (Gk. *pneuma*), the guiding principle, of their minds so that they can put on the new self which was originally created to be like God in righteousness and holiness. There is a whole story tucked away in these three little phrases, *put off your old self... put on the new self... being renewed in the attitude of your minds*.

Bunyan can help us here again. After the two boys, Passion and Patience, the next illustration Interpreter shows Christian is the fire burning in the grate and the devil constantly seeking to extinguish it by throwing water on it; however, it only burned hotter and brighter. When Christian asked how this could be, he was taken to a room

**continued from previous page**

behind the fireplace where Christ was constantly pouring on to the fire the oil of the Spirit so that the devil's efforts were frustrated: ... *being renewed in the attitude of your minds*. Our *putting off of the old self* would have failed years ago, as would our *putting on of the new self*, were it not for Christ *renewing our minds* day by day by that oil of the Spirit!

However, in verse 24, Paul points us to the purpose of this work of God in our lives: the *new self* was *created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness*. In pointing us to God's loving purpose for us, he has gone right back to Genesis 1 and to our creation in the image of God Act 1, Scene 1, of the Bible's plot-line. God's desire for us is that we should be godlike, his sons and daughters, clothed with righteousness so that all relationships are right and marked by godly integrity; and that we should

be holy – belonging exclusively to God and living as those who are owned by him, so we become like him. 'Isn't that boy like his father', we often hear it said. God longs that will be said of every son and daughter of his!

Now I confess that I have dealt superficially with this passage. It deserves several Sunday mornings of expository preaching. But my aim has been to attempt to show how the Word of God answers point by point the gross misconceptions and confusion of so much thinking today. The Word of God is the resource God has given us to confront with boldness and discernment a culture which opposes his truth, even by denying there is objective, absolute truth, thus deceiving our generation and robbing them of the grace of God.

No, not by singing lots of jolly songs, nor by getting cheap laughs, nor

even by moving a congregation to tears through appealing to their emotions, will we build a living church. I am not saying our praise will not be contemporary and joyful, nor that there cannot be humour in the pulpit or smiles from the congregation. Far less am I saying there will be no appeal to the emotions – clearly our preaching must address the whole person – mind, will and emotions. What I mean is that it must be by grappling with the Word of God and relating it to life today that our people will be built up into Christ and together will become more effectively the Body of Christ – that, after all, is the wider context of all that Paul is saying here. May God so help us all.

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# **“Festschrift”**

## **in honour of the Reverend James Philip**

## **Serving the Word of God**



James Philip with Mary his wife, son Willie with wife Rebecca, and daughter Jen with husband Nigel.

January 2002 saw the eightieth birthday of James Philip which date was marked by the publication of a book in his honour to mark his life and ministry.

James Philip was one of the key figures in Scottish Evangelical life in the second half of the twentieth century. His preaching first in the north-east fishing village of Gardenstown, and then for forty years in the University City of Edinburgh, touched countless lives – from fishermen to students, schoolchildren to nurses, young professionals to senior citizens. Many were called to overseas mission and even more to church ministry. James Philip’s single-minded commitment to preaching and prayer became a model for a whole generation of evangelical pastors. This book draws together eyewitness accounts and first-hand testimony to pay tribute to a minister of the word of God of remarkable passion and power.

*Serving the Word of God* edited by David Wright and David Stay  
Published by Christian Focus and Rutherford House. 275pp.  
ISBN 1 85792 745 1



# The Wedding Garment

A Sermon Preached at Aberavon, February 21, 1932  
by D Martyn Lloyd-Jones

*The king said to him, Friend, how did you come in here not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless.*

Matthew 22:12

One of the greatest dangers in connection with both the preaching and private reading of the Word of God is that they should simply produce some vague general effect upon us instead of that definite particular effect which alone can benefit us. You must all have experienced this many a time. You sit and listen to the sermon or the address and something happens to you. You are moved and disturbed. It would be obviously wrong to say that nothing had happened to you, and yet if someone were to ask you at the end in what respect you had been affected, you would be unable to give an exact answer. There was an effect, but it was vague, general and indefinite. But it passed off and left you precisely where you were at the beginning.

Now I believe God never intended the reading or preaching of His Word should produce an effect like that. The Bible is not merely literature or poetry; it was never intended to produce merely an artistic or general effect. It is

the Word of God to men and women, and what is intended is not so much that we should vaguely feel God is speaking to us, but rather that we should know exactly what he is saying. Nor is it enough that we should have some sense and feeling of the holiness and awe of it all. We must not be content with that, nor even be carried away by that, for we must remember that God himself is speaking to us. God's speaking in the Old Testament was direct and definite always. How much more so in the New Testament! Our business at all times therefore when studying the Scriptures is to guard ourselves against that mere general impression and to insist upon discovering what exactly it is that God is saying to us.

Now this is more necessary, perhaps, with this parable we are considering than with anything else that is to be found in the sacred records. It is such a perfect and, at the same time, such a terrible picture! We read it or hear it and we cannot but be affected by it. It may cause us to shudder, may stimulate our imagination and even alarm us by its horrifying figure of the end of this guest at the

wedding feast, and yet the whole thing can be quite ephemeral and passing, and after a few hours we return to our normal state. We must not be content with just feeling that this is a terrifying, horrifying picture. We must discover what exactly it is that it has to say to us. What is its message? Our Lord was not just painting a dramatic picture, not out merely to produce some histrionic effect. He was out to preach and inculcate a vital truth. What was that?

## The one test God applies

To my mind there is only one great principle taught in this parable. There are many minor and subsidiary truths but there is one that stands out above all the others: ultimately and finally, whether we have given our wills, our very selves to him or not. I say 'ultimately and finally' because that is the exact point which is made here, for we are shown with awful, terrifying clarity that unless we have actually done this, all else is of no value whatsoever. Here is a man actually in the banquet hall, seated at the table with the food placed before him ready to eat, who, suddenly, at the critical, all-important moment is

condemned, bound hand and foot and cast into outer darkness! And all because of just one thing. Everything right, except that he had no wedding garment on – that he had disobeyed the king in that vitally important respect!

How frequently our Lord pressed this point. With what terrible clearness is it to be seen in the New Testament by those who have eyes to see! There it is, plain and clear, and yet men and women will not see it.

***‘Listening to my words’, says our Lord, ‘is right and good. But it is not enough. They must be carried out. That you have heard and enjoyed will not save you. Have you done them?’***

Look at the parable about the two houses at the close of the Sermon on the Mount. Those houses were apparently identical in every respect, except in one thing and that so vital that it made all the difference, that terrible difference! The similarity in all other respects could not compensate for that one difference. ‘Listening to my words’, says our Lord, ‘is right and good. But it is not enough. They must be carried out. That you have heard and enjoyed will not save you. Have you done them? To call me, Lord, Lord, is good in its way but it is quite meaningless unless you do those things that I tell you.’

#### **‘Unofficial believers’**

This one thing of giving our wills to God determines whether we are destined for heaven or hell. How vitally important it is! Yet, how sadly ignored, especially today! Is it not our one difficulty with the question of religion? We are prepared to do anything else. But not this. Those outside the church are often willing to give up this and that sin, are prepared to do a certain amount of good and help others, ready even to read their Bibles and attend a

place of worship on Sunday, but they cannot see why they must acknowledge Christ as Saviour and Lord and align themselves with others who make the same profession.

They are prepared to give well toward the funds and so on, but they are not prepared to give themselves. They say they believe the gospel and that they propose to be, as it were, ‘unofficial Christians’ outside the church. They cannot see that they must be known and recognized as Christians and as active church members helping to bear a common witness and testimony to the saving power of our Lord. Yes! everything except the wedding garment!

#### **Everything-except...!**

But I say that it applies also to many who are members of churches. Their names are on the church roll, they attend regularly on Sundays, they give generously towards the cause, they desire to go to heaven. But they cannot see all this necessitates their forsaking worldly, fleshly pleasures, giving up of everything their consciences tell them is wrong and all those things so frequently condemned in the New Testament – lusts, passions, envy, greed, covetousness etc. They cannot see that they ought to enjoy the prayer meetings and fellowship meetings and throw themselves wholeheartedly on to God’s side. They desire to be Christians, but in their own way and on their own terms, and not as laid down once and for ever in the New Testament, and as confirmed ever since in the lives of the saints.

Yes, there it is again! Everything! except the wedding garment! Everything, except giving up our wills, our very selves to God, everything except the one thing which is essential, namely, that we should cast ourselves entirely on his mercy and place ourselves without reservation in his hands!

Do we realize what such a resistance means and implies? Have we ever contemplated the dreadful consequences in which it will involve us? It is because I am anxious that all our eyes may be opened to this terrible sin of

refusing to give ourselves to God, and that thereby we may come to hate and abominate it and, forsaking it, give ourselves to God, that I ask you to consider with me some of the principles involved in this matter. They are all shown clearly in this parable.

### **Arrogance towards God**

Consider, the arrogance towards God this attitude displays. One does not need to be a very profound psychologist in order to see that was the fundamental trouble with this man. Neither does one need much insight into oneself to see that there is that sort of person in each and everyone of us. Listen to him as he soliloquises seated there at the table. He has heard and accepted the invitation and has entered the banqueting hall. He is anxious to be there and to have all that he can get, but he objects to this necessity of wearing the wedding-garment. He looks round at all the others appropriately clad and in his heart he despises them.

'Ah, the miserable worms,' he says, 'all bowing and scraping to the king, all afraid to maintain their own individuality and independence. All like sheep obeying this king. Who is this king? What right has he to dictate to me or to anyone else as to what we should do? I am prepared to come to his banquet in honour of his son, but why cannot I come in my own way? I prefer to come dressed as I am. Why must I be forced to put on a wedding garment? I won't do it! This king has no right to expect it either. Who is he! I come to this banquet in my way. I refuse to be dictated to!'

### **Hopeless self-contradiction**

How natural his thinking is, but how terrible! Prepared to eat of the king's banquet and yet insulting the king and dishonouring him. Taking the gift and yet feeling a sense of grudge and enmity towards the giver. Accepting of the king's bounty, and yet questioning the king's greatness and dignity! Nay more, feeling a real sense of grievance against the king. Look at the wretch as he sits there at the table!

He is the one exception, the only one who, in the smallness of his soul, causes a discord on this joyous occasion. All because of his own little self-importance! All because he refuses to be like everybody else. All because he still keeps on thinking about his own little rights and big ideas even in the presence of the magnificence and kindness of the king. There he sits in the bitterness and misery of his soul, a perfect picture of hopeless self-contradiction, muttering to himself and trying to preserve his own dignity even in the presence of his king. His object was, as we say today, 'to stand up to the

***Why must I be forced to put on a wedding garment? I won't do it! This king has no right to expect it either. Who is he! I come to this banquet in my way. I refuse to be dictated to!***

king', to 'assert himself', even while he was accepting a gift. How ungracious, how arrogant!

### **What right has God...?**

But all that is a perfect picture of sin, indeed of the very essence of sin. Do you remember the account of the first sin in the Book of Genesis? It is precisely the same thing. The serpent says, 'Has God said, You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?' In other words, 'What right has God to say that?' Then when Eve proceeds to repeat the commandment he replies: 'Don't believe him. You shall not die.' And again, 'For God knows that in the day you eat of it, your eyes shall be opened, and you shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.' 'Who is God?' says Satan in effect, 'what right has he to speak like that and to rule you in this way? Don't listen to him. Live your own life in your own way. What right has God to upset your life and stand between you and your pleasure?'

Have we not all known these questions within our own hearts? Are not men and women voicing them con-

stantly? 'Why should God do this or that?' or 'I do not see that God should do this or that.' 'What right has God to dictate?' 'What right has God to send anyone to hell?' 'What right has God or anyone else to ask me to give up my will to him?' In our pride and self-will we try to stand up to God. We put our little opinions against his! We desire to get to heaven but, we say, we 'cannot see' this and that. We cannot see why God insists upon our believing that Christ died for us and that that is the only way to His heart. We cannot see why we must give up our sins and give our very lives to Him. We feel it is unfair, that it is wrong, that God is a tyrant and, forsaking this sacred writ which is the only authoritative statement on the subject, we are trying to construct a new God who is all-loving but devoid of righteousness and truth. God must be as we think! And if there is anything that does not tally with our view it is a blemish in God!

#### **Guilty!**

Oh! the arrogance and enmity of sin. Do you realize you are guilty of it? Do you know that every time you query or question or debate with the voice of God as it speaks within you and urges you to give up all else and give yourself entirely to him, you are in that precise position? The creature arguing with the Creator! The clay reasoning with the potter. The subject insulting the king! The wedding garment in itself matters very little. The point is that the wearing of it is the king's wish. The terrible thing is that we are questioning the whole authority of God-putting our opinions and ideas against his!

Let me make this quite plain. We are to submit not because we agree but because it is God's will. By nature, we will always disagree. We like and enjoy sin, and if we are to wait until we no longer do so we shall have to wait for ever. The first reason for leaving sin is that God commands me to do so. He is perfect. He is pure. He is just and righteous. He made me. He loves me. He knows what is best for me. Though I do not fully understand or know the

*...he was quite  
unsuited for such an  
occasion. He was not  
of royal blood, nor  
even of noble blood.  
He was just an  
ordinary man who by  
a very gracious act of  
his sovereign was  
invited to the feast.  
What a great  
privilege!*

reasons why, I do it because he tells me. He knows better than I do. I trust Him more than I trust myself because he is who and what he is.

Beloved friends! See the arrogance and spitefulness of your refusal to bow the knee to God's will! That is exactly what sin and disobedience means. You are questioning and querying Almighty God! The only reason he gives when he asks us to be holy is that he is holy himself!

#### **Base ingratitude**

When we consider the base ingratitude this attitude reveals, its arrogance becomes still more obvious. This man was mean in soul. See how obvious that is. To start with he had no claim whatsoever upon the king. This particular man in our text did not belong to that group of people who were entitled to receive an invitation but slighted it. He had no right, no claim. It was nothing but the graciousness of the king that had invited him. In a sense he was quite unsuited for such an occasion. He was not of royal blood, nor even of noble blood. He was just an ordinary man who by a very gracious act of his sovereign was invited to the feast. What a great privilege!

There he was in the palace with a glorious feast before him, with the lights and the pleasure and all that resulted from the munificence of the king who was honouring his son. Everything for nothing. All free! All he had to do was to show his appreciation and to do what he could to be worthy of the great occasion, in no way to disappoint his gracious benefactor! But as we see here, he failed to do so and allowed his pride to upset everything. Was there ever such ingratitude, such baseness? What a cad he appears to have been! What a vile creature! What a miserable worm!

#### **No claim on God**

And yet, what is all that in comparison with what is true of each one of us who refuses to bow the knee willingly to God? Do you realize what that refusal really means? I have told you often before, but may the Holy Spirit

strengthen me tonight that you may so see it as to hate yourself for your ingratitude, and put yourself right with God at once! I have pointed out that this man had no claim whatsoever upon the king's munificence. How much more so is that true of us with respect to God? We have no claim upon him, no right to his gifts. Worse, by our sinfulness and disobedience, by our flouting of his laws and our spurning of his voice, we have not only forfeited any claim to his love, but have actually invited his wrath and condemnation. We have sinned deliberately against him, turning our backs upon him, doing everything which is insulting to his holy Name.

Though men may have been outwardly respectable and free from certain sins, can they claim they have obeyed God and have been what they have been in order to glorify him? Not to think of God is grievously to offend him. Not to praise him day by day for all he is and has done is in itself terrible sin. The angels adore and worship him, why, even the Son bows down before him! And you and I have gone for days, weeks, months, years without ever thinking of him at all. Even when he has disturbed us and tried to speak to us we have asked him to wait until we have more time! We have not a single claim on his love and we richly merit his eternal wrath!

## The greatest gift possible

But, so wonderful and amazing is his love, that, in spite of it all, he sent his Son to live, die and rise again for us. In Christ he offers us complete forgiveness, reinstatement in his family, power to overcome the devil and all evil, all the graces of the Holy Spirit in this world and, in the world to come, everlasting bliss and eternal life. In spite of all our sins, that is what he has done. He has done much more than to invite us to the banquet in honour of his Son. He gave his Son to death and the cross for our sake.

What amazing love! What mercy and generosity! It is beyond our comprehension. The greatest gift possible,

infinite and eternal. The king not only giving a feast, but giving himself! But because he insists on one simple condition, simply that we should honour him and show our gratitude to him who so richly deserves it, we object and complain and regard him almost as an enemy.

Could anything be so terrible! Could anything be more ungrateful! Simply because he asks you to be holy and adorned with his righteousness, simply because he asks you to take off those filthy rags of your sinful life and self-righteous attitude, you spurn his love and reject his amazing gift. Have you realized that? Behold God's love pouring itself out for you on Calvary's hill. It is bad enough, as we have seen, to question his law, but oh! the enormity of the sin that rejects his love. Can you not see that 'Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all'?

## Folly and tragedy

I must say a word about the folly and tragedy of this attitude. Surely this man in the parable is the most wretched person mentioned in the New Testament. For sheer misery and wretchedness there is nothing that even approaches this. There he sits, thinking himself so clever, nursing his self-esteem and despising his fellow guests who appear to him slavish and frightened. How proud of himself he must feel! What a wonderful man he is to get what he wants in his own way!

Then suddenly the king appears and, observing him to be without the wedding garment, approaches him and says to him gently, 'Friend, how did come in here not having a wedding garment?' He is speechless! What can he say? That word 'Friend' has done it. He sees his utterly despicable nature. 'Friend'! But it is too late. The opportunity has gone.

When an offer of love is rejected there is nothing left. He is bound and cast into outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth and all the agony of useless remorse. Oh! what a fool! what madness! There in the outer darkness, cursing and tormenting

himself because of his folly – when he might have been with the others in the banqueting chamber, enjoying the feast, the music, the good cheer and all the joy of the palace! All because of that one act of disobedience. What a fool we see him to be. How obvious is his error.

Have you realized your position is even worse if you have not submitted yourself unreservedly to God in Jesus Christ our Lord? As certain as you are alive now, all this will happen to you one day. You will see him and all he has done for you, how you might have conquered your sins and temptations in this world and inherited heaven, like so many that lived at the same time as yourself in Aberavon and who had precisely the same difficulties. Ah yes! you will see it.

But it will be too late then. And you will begin an eternity of useless remorse, of hell! All because you would not submit but ignored God's voice within. All because you held on to some useless worldly pleasure or some sin, fearing the opinion of men more than that of God. Oh! I plead with you, see the madness, the folly, the tragedy of it all. It is not yet too late. There is still time. God's majesty dictates it, His love demands it, your own eternal soul cries out for it and deserves it. Give yourself to God tonight! Do it now! Submit and be saved.

Thank God now for his amazing gift of love. Show your genuineness and appreciation by standing for him tonight and by pledging yourself that as his Holy Spirit strengthens you, and at whatever cost and sacrifice, your one ambition for life and for ever will be to glorify and magnify his holy Name. Put on the wedding garment now and enjoy the heavenly feast for ever! For his Name's sake. Amen.

# The Clash of

## Preaching on the Ten Plagues

*Why do we preach the Law, I mean the Pentateuch? Of course there is more than law in the Pentateuch and there is law in more places than the Pentateuch. Note however, that when we are preaching from these first five books, we are preaching Christ. What does that mean? Preaching from Leviticus, then tagging on an application at the end is not preaching Christ! That's more like those children talks we're all probably guilty of, where we tell a splendid story and then say, 'Now boys and girls, that reminds us of Jesus'!*

### Preaching the gospel in creation

If we take Genesis seriously, particularly Genesis 1-3, we already have a model of preaching Christ. Take the two Creation accounts. (Incidentally, the old JDEP source theory many of us were brought up on, since the 1970s has been largely discredited in the academic world). Consider the two differing ways in which the crea-

tion story is told. In Genesis 1, God is up there; he is transcendent; he speaks and things happen. He says, 'Let there be light', and there is light. Then in Genesis 2, the same God comes down into the narrative; he becomes a character in the story. He takes clay and forms human beings. He walks in the garden, and when things go wrong he mounts a rescue operation. Isn't that a concise adumbration of the whole gospel? God who is up there comes down when things go wrong and puts himself to immense effort to put it right. That's what I mean by preaching Christ from the Old Testament.

If we only had the God of Genesis 1, he would be a kind of 'super-billionaire' whom we couldn't contact but only grope at. Of course we need that view of God because so many modern views of God limit him – this is penetrating the evangelical world with people like Clark Pinnock, speaking of a God who does not control everything according to the council of his will. We need the God of Genesis 1, but if we only have that God, he is remote and ultimately unknowable.

On the other hand, if we only have the God of Genesis 2, the vulnerable God (popular in many modern theologies), who comes alongside us, suffers with us, feels for us and becomes one of us, then of course we have a God who cannot control, who is vulnerable to circumstances. However when we put the two together, we have the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is transcendent but also comes down. So that is our starting point for preaching Christ, because that is the Word who became flesh, the God who reveals himself. So we are preaching Christ, not primarily teaching the Law.

### Basic to Scripture

In a sense, the Pentateuch is not a literary genre like other literary genres, like narrative or poetry. It is a genre on its own like the gospels. Indeed, like the gospels, it is the most basic part of the Testament. It's not that the Pentateuch and the Gospels are more inspired than the rest of Scripture. Rather, if the events of the Pentateuch and the Gospels had not happened, there would be nothing for the proph-

# the Titans

Robert Fyall, Durham

ets or wisdom writers or the apostles to write about. It is from the Pentateuch (and Gospels) the rest of the Bible flows. Also, like the Gospels, there is a multitude of different literary genres throughout the Pentateuch – narrative, ethics, sacrificial material, poetry – remember the songs of Moses, the Song of the Sea (Ex.15) and the Song of Moses (Deut. 33).

## Law and story

Next, a word on how law and story hang together. If we're going to *preach* the Bible well, we must first learn to *read* the Bible well. Many of us read the Bible in a very flat, unimaginative way. The famous 19th century dictum said the Bible must be read like any other book. We know the context in which that was said was the denial of the supernatural elements, of inspiration and miracle, and naturally we would not want to go down that road.

Nevertheless, there is a sense in which the Bible must be read like any other book in that we must have regard to each particular genre. In other words, if we want to get inside the

plague narratives, we have to ask ourselves what kind of a story it is. Is it the same, for example, as the story of David and Goliath? Is it a story like the book of Ruth or Esther? Learning to read the Scriptures is a life-long endeavour, entering the text imaginatively, particularly noticing what is surprising and what questions are raised.

## The interpretative key

At last we come to my subject, 'The Clash of the Titans', by which I mean (as in the film of that name) a battle between supernatural powers. To understand the plague narratives, we need the interpretative key. It is in Exodus 12:12: *On that same night I will pass through Egypt and strike down every first born, both men and animals, and I will bring judgement on all the gods of Egypt. I am Yahweh; I am the Lord.* Sneering, Pharaoh had asked, 'Who is Yahweh? I've heard of an Osiris and an Amun-Ra. Who is Yahweh that I should serve him?' Here is the answer. 'I will bring judgement on all the gods of Egypt. I am Yahweh.'

## The plot

When looking at narrative the first thing we ask is 'What?' We look at the plot. What is the plot of this story saying? Many rationalist interpretations argue what happens here is essentially a natural process. It begins in July with an exceptional inundation of the Nile causing red earth to be brought down from the blue Nile, hence the water looks like blood. That in turn causes the frogs to leave the polluted waters, and when the dead frogs lie in heaps that causes diseases, boils among the cattle. Infection results spread by gnats, and then the sand storm comes in from the desert, hence the plague of darkness.

Even if this is a valid explanation of nine plagues, one is tempted to say, 'So what?' How are you going to apply that in such a way as to show its relevance? In any case it leaves untouched the death of the firstborn. There is no way the death of the firstborn fits into any natural process.

### Pagan gods attacked

Surely the plagues are an attack on the Egyptian gods. Let me just give you some examples. The Nile itself was held to be a god, regulated, it was believed, by Pharaoh himself. When the life-giving god of Egypt is attacked, there is clearly another God at work. The darkness may well have been a sand storm. But, more important, there is an inscription in the Valley of the Kings on one of the tombs, addressing the Sun god. 'Hail to you Amun-Ra, who never since the dawn of creation, has failed to rise to gladden the hearts of your worshippers'. Well, says our Scripture, here were three days when Amun-Ra failed to rise to gladden the hearts of his worshippers, because Amun-Ra was being attacked by a greater God.

Isn't that the theme of Revelation 12 – the Man Child caught up to God and his throne as the dragon tries to devour him? This is what the plague narrative is about, and this can revolutionise Christian living. We are in a great battle (cf. Eph. 6) which isn't only mentioned in the obvious biblical passages. It begins in Genesis 3:15: *the descendent of the woman will crush the head of the serpent* – it's a river flowing through the whole of the Old Testament until it breaks into flood in the coming of Christ himself, and the great battle against Satan. The plot is a clash of the Titans. It's about principalities and powers and how human beings are involved in that.

### Characterization

What about the characters in the story? An astonishing thing occurs in Exodus 7:1: *The Lord said to Moses, See I have made you like God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron will be your prophet.* God will not deal directly with Pharaoh, he will not come down and contend with him. He will send Moses as his representative to confront him. How will Moses confront him? With the Word of God, the sharp two-edged sword, that comes out of the mouth of the rider on the white horse in Revela-

tion. So God both conceals and reveals himself. We have this astonishing and unique passage in the Old Testament where a man is actually himself given a prophet, Aaron, who is going to be Moses' mouth-piece.

Often this is where the old fashioned, unimaginative scholarship gets it wrong: they don't know why Aaron is introduced in some places. He is introduced because he is the prophet, the spokesman. It's not a clumsy introduction by P, or J, or E, or D – incidentally none of whom have ever been found, they only exist in the imagination of scholars.

***here were three days when Amun-Ra failed to rise to gladden the hearts of his worshippers, because Amun-Ra was being attacked by a greater God***

### Structure

The plagues can be divided in to three 'triads', then comes the death of the firstborn in which the nine culminate. First is the contest with the magicians: the plague of blood, the plague of frogs, the plague of gnats (7:14-8:19). This is a skirmish of underlings. That is why Aaron is important here. The 'principals' are not on the stage so much, it's a contest more between the magicians and Aaron. The key phrase seems to be, *This is the finger of God* (8:19). They realize this is a god they do not know. Certainly none of the Egyptian pantheon was at work.

The second triad (8:20-9:12) comprises the plague of flies, the plague on livestock and the plague of boils. The key is, *On that day I will deal differently with the land of Goshen where my people live, so that you will know that I the Lord am in this land* (8:22-23). This is Yahweh, the God of the Covenant, and Moses is now given a higher profile.

The third triad (9:13-10:29) comprises the hail, the locusts and the darkness. Here Moses says, *Just as you*



say, *I will never appear before you again* (10:29). Brought to the forefront, Moses then bows out because the plague of the firstborn is a direct confrontation between Yahweh and Pharaoh, the god-king of Egypt and the next incarnation of the god-king, Pharaoh's firstborn, is about to be destroyed.

Here we have a tremendous, cumulative story of power. This is not just a powerful god, another deity. This is Yahweh who rules in heaven and earth. If you wanted a sound bite to sum up the Old Testament (I hope you

for this very purpose, that I might show you my power, my name might be proclaimed in all the earth. You still set yourself against my people and will not let them go. Therefore, at this time tomorrow, I will send the worst hailstorm that has ever fallen on Egypt, from the day it was founded until now.

But notice the mercy of God: *Give an order now to bring your livestock and everything you have in the field to a place of shelter, because the hail will fall on every man and animal that has not been brought in and is still out in the field, and they will die.*

### Structure

Verses 13-19 correspond to verses 32-35 because they both refer to the hardening of Pharaoh's heart. Significant differences of course: *God* hardens Pharaoh's heart and then Pharaoh hardens his own heart. We have the idea that there are two phrases which together appear to be contradictory but to get the whole picture, both have to be taken. God hardens Pharaoh's heart, yet Pharaoh hardens his own heart: the mystery of providence and free-will.

Then verses 20-21 correspond to verses 27-30 which are both responses to the Word of God. In between, verses 22-26, which use the language of theophany, of God appearing in power in his creation, correspond to verses 31-32 about the flax and barley being destroyed. Clearly it is an extremely well constructed narrative.

### Preaching the plagues

I hope you will not get into the pulpit say, 'Notice the structure of this', and tell them it is chiasmic! However, we must work at it and show our people how beautifully ordered the narrative is. Do it in the best way you can. Use every homeletical device to unfold that to your people. What needs to happen here is that our people sense the presence of God. This is a passage about God appearing in his creation, like Habakkuk 3, Job 38, Psalms 18 and 29 etc.

Isn't that ultimately what preaching is all about – conveying the presence of

## God hardens Pharaoh's heart, yet Pharaoh hardens his own heart: the mystery of providence and free-will

don't go in for that kind of thing!), you could do a lot worse than 'the incomparability of Yahweh'. As Isaiah says: *To whom will you liken God, and with what comparison will you compare him?* (40:18).

The plague narratives: tremendous, powerful, cumulative narrative with the story building up in three triads with the characters of Aaron and Moses appearing or disappearing, depending on what theme is being focused on.

### The plague of hail

Turn now to the plague of hail which can be viewed as the turning point of the whole narrative (9:13-35). *This is what the Lord, the God of the Hebrews says, Let my people go, that they may worship me, or this time I will send the full force of my plagues against you, and against your officials and your people, so that you may know there is no one like me in all the earth.* (Here is the incomparability theme.) *For by now I could have stretched out my hand and struck you and your people with a plague that would have wiped you off the earth, but I have raised you up*

the Almighty God? We need to bring into our preaching a sense of the living Christ who speaks through his word, who changes the church through his word, and who converts the world so that unbelievers fall down on their faces and say, 'God is surely among you'. It can come just through showing the structure is beautifully clear, the theophany language awesome, God present and at work, his word alive and powerful.

### **Human response to his word**

In all our preaching, ultimately we are trying to bring together the presence of God and the human response. This is the turning point because this is where the living God confronts Pharaoh as he had confronted Moses.

*Had I been present on the day of creation, I would have given some very useful advice*

Many people ask the obvious question, 'If Pharaoh's heart was hardened, how could he be blamed?' It's a fair and legitimate question to ask. In this plague of hail narrative, we have the answer: *Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Stretch out your hand towards the sky, so that hail will fall all over Egypt, on men and animals, everything growing in the fields of Egypt. When Moses stretched out his staff towards the sky, the Lord sent thunder and hail and lightning flashed down to the ground. So the Lord rained hail on the land of Egypt, hail and lightning flashed back and forth (9: 22-24).* It was the worst storm in the land of Egypt since it had become a nation. Fire flashed down to the ground ('fire' is better translation, the normal Hebrew word for lightning is not used; 'fire' is deliberately used).

Both Moses and Pharaoh were confronted by the same God of fire. He wasn't a God of love who confronted Moses, and a different God of judgement who confronted Pharaoh; this is

deliberately shown by the use and repetition of the same word 'fire': *The angel of the Lord appeared to Moses in flames of fire from within the bush (3:2).* Both men had a genuine choice. The difference was that Moses accepted and Pharaoh rejected. Not of course that Moses accepted immediately. We're familiar with the evasions and excuses Moses used, some of them genuine, some of them the kind of excuses we ourselves have used; maybe we used them before we were called to the ministry, maybe we've used them while in the ministry. 'No Lord, that's not right for me!' – the kind of excuse when we say in effect, 'Lord, I actually know better'. Like Frederic of Prussia who said, 'Had I been present on the day of creation, I would have given some very useful advice.'

Notice here a fascinating point. God is utterly loving and patient with Moses. He meets every excuse with reassurance. He meets every evasion with an answer and a blessing, until Moses says, 'Send someone else'. Then God becomes really angry and tells Moses not ever to dare speak like that again, for he, God, never gets the wrong person! That's an encouragement. If you're in the battle and feeling like running away, you're queuing for the boat to Tarshish – there's always a berth available on the boat to Tarshish – then remember: God never gets the wrong person! Be assured he has placed you where he wants you, and hold on. He will not send anyone else until his purpose for you in that place is complete. It's not that the time doesn't come to move on, rather is it that when God calls and places us somewhere, we must stay there until he moves us.

This same God now confronts Pharaoh in the same way, but Pharaoh behaves differently. Remember at the end of *The Last Battle* (C.S. Lewis's Narnia story), when the animals and other creatures face Aslan, they face him with fear; however some face him with continuing hatred and disappear into the dark shadow on his left hand side. In other words, this story is presenting us the big issues of heaven and

hell. This is what this story is about. It is about eternal destinies and what we are going to do with Christ Jesus.

### **The big picture**

We come now to four concluding observations. *First*, we've looked at the stories as a whole and at one in particular, and I've suggested some ways in which we might draw out the great themes. Any narrative, indeed any Biblical passage at all, must be fitted into *the big picture*. The jargon word is 'meta-narrative', the big narrative that gives significance to the other narratives.

This story begins, not in Exodus 5, but in Genesis 3:15, and continues throughout Scripture. It is continuing when Elijah confronts the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel. Think, for example, about the Exile. If you want to understand Old Testament, see how it revolves round the twin poles of Exodus and Exile with a thousand years in between, when the God of creation again comes down as he did in Genesis 3, and calls the nation back to himself, showing his power by defeating the gods of Egypt.

What of the Exile? Does that mean Yahweh, who defeated the gods of Egypt, is now weaker than the gods of Babylon? Has he been defeated by Marduk and Nebo? That is the great issue the exilic prophets wrestle with. When Ezekiel on the Plains of Kebar has a vision in the sky, he sees in effect the Ark of the Covenant, the portable Ark of the Covenant because the glory of Yahweh is not confined to Jerusalem, he is not a local godlet. He is the Lord of heaven and earth, able to appear in Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon, able to appear in the blazing furnace beside his three servants, able to appear in the lion's den, able to control the beast that rises out of the great sea.

Thus throughout the Old Testament is this major theme, sometimes coming to the surface as in these passages, but always this great clash of the Titans. At last the Son of God comes to destroy the works of the Devil and there is that great conflict with which Scripture ends, the war in heaven, Michael and

his angels fighting against the dragon. There is the great battle in Revelation 19 when the Devil, the beast and the false prophet are destroyed.

However we interpret these difficult chapters, it is the climax of this battle. The judgements of the bowls and the trumpets in Revelation use much of the imagery of these plague stories. And so we come finally to the mirror image, beyond Genesis 1 and 2, when the dwelling of God is with his people, the reappearance of the Tree of Life, and God will again live with them and they will be his people and he will be their God.

So we fit the plagues of Exodus into the big story. We show our people the coherence of the Bible. The Bible is

***We only get the best out of our Bibles when we see the completeness of the whole story***

not a pick'n'mix rag box! We only get the best out of our Bibles when we see the completeness of the whole story.

### **The big theological issues**

In the account of the plagues we have seen *the issues* of providence and free will. Think how often this comes out elsewhere. In Ruth, for example, see how well it is dramatized. In chapter 2 no human being does anything, they are simply 'nudged'. The characteristic phrase of the author is 'as it happened', meaning 'as God nudged'. In Ruth 3 one might imagine God had no say at all. There is Naomi's surprising ploy, to which Ruth agrees, but when we put the two chapters together we see in several ordinary lives the great issues of providence and free-will played out. Paul wrestles with these same issues in Romans 9-11, and again, on the international stage and on the cosmic stage, the clash of the Titans is played out.

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**Story as story**

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The third observation is study the *story as a story*. By the way, the way in which very often you get the flow of the narrative is to read the Bible out loud to yourself. If you're just sitting in a chair like that reading it, you're probably nodding off, and between the plague of blood and the plague of the firstborn you've probably learned nothing, and remembered nothing. Read it aloud, get into the story.

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**Preach Christ**

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Finally, preach Christ from this story. I hope I've shown that does not mean you tell the story and then say, 'This is like the cross and the resurrection'. Rather we must show this is one of the windows into that great reality, that great battle which the Lord God himself announced in Genesis 3, where he took his place on the side of humanity, against the dragon, against the Devil, against the serpent. He himself has promised that there will be a great outcome to this battle, glorious success in this war.

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# The Subversive Pastor

Eugene H Peterson

*I am undermining the kingdom of self and establishing the kingdom of God. I am being subversive.*

As a pastor, I don't like being viewed as nice but insignificant. I bristle when a high-energy executive leaves the place of worship with the comment, 'This was wonderful, Pastor, but now we have to get back to the real world, don't we?' I had thought we were in the most real world, the world revealed as God's, a world believed to be invaded by God's grace and turning on the pivot of Christ's crucifixion and resurrection. The executive's comment brings me up short: he isn't taking this seriously. Worshipping God is marginal to making money. Prayer is marginal to the bottom line. Christian salvation is a brand preference.

## **Doomed to destruction**

I bristle and want to assert my importance. I want to force the recognition of the key position I hold in the economy of God and in *his* economy

if only he knew it. Then I remember that I am a subversive. My long-term effectiveness depends on my not being recognized for who I really am. If he realized that I actually believe our Western way of life is doomed to destruction, and that another kingdom is right now being formed in secret to take its place, he wouldn't be at all pleased. If he knew what I was really doing and the difference it was making, he would fire me.

Yes, I believe that. I believe that the kingdoms of this world, Western and Venezuelan and Chinese, will become the kingdom of our God and Christ, and I believe this new kingdom is already among us. That is why I'm a pastor, to introduce people to the real world and train them to live in it. I learned early that the methods of my work must correspond to the realities of the kingdom. The methods that make the kingdom of America strong – economic, military, technological, informational – are not suited to making the kingdom of God strong. I have had to learn a new methodology: truth-telling and love-making, prayer

and parable. These are not methods very well adapted to raising the standard of living in suburbia or massaging the ego into a fashionable shape.

### **God a vague extrapolation**

But America and suburbia and the ego compose my parish. Most of the individuals in this amalgam suppose that the goals they have for themselves and the goals God has for them are the same. It is the oldest religious mistake: refusing to countenance any real difference between God and us, imagining God to be a vague extrapolation of our own desires, and then hiring a priest to manage the affairs between self and the extrapolation. And I, one of the priests they hired, am having none of it.

But if I'm not willing to help them become what they want to be, what am I doing taking their pay? I am being subversive. I am undermining the kingdom of self and establishing the kingdom of God. I am helping them to become what God wants them to be, using the methods of subversion.

But isn't that dishonest? Not exactly, for I'm not misrepresenting myself. I'm simply taking my words and acts at a level of seriousness that would throw them into a state of catatonic disbelief if they ever knew.

### **The Pastor's Odd Niche**

Pastors occupy an odd niche in Western culture. Christian communities employ us to lead worship, teach and preach the Scriptures, and provide guidance and encouragement in the pilgrim way. Within our congregation, we experience a modest honour in our position. Occasionally one of us rises to national prominence and catches the attention of large numbers of people with the charisma of sunny, millennial cheerleading or (less often) the scary forecasts of Armageddon. But most of us are known by name only to our congregations and, except for ceremonial appearances at weddings, funerals and barbecues, are not in the public eye.

## ***Within our congregation, we experience a modest honour in our position***

### **Pastors harmless innocents**

In general people treat us with respect, but we are not considered important in any social, cultural, or economic way. In parody we are usually treated as harmless innocents, in satire as shiftless parasites.

This is not what most of us had in mind when we signed on. We had not counted on anything either so benign or so marginal. The images forming our pastoral expectations had a good deal more fierceness to them: Moses' bearding the Pharaoh; Jeremiah with fire in his mouth; Peter swashbucklingly reckless as the lead apostle; Paul's careering through prison and ecstasy, shipwreck and kerygma. The kingdom of God in which we had apprenticed ourselves was presented to us as revolutionary, a dangerously unwelcome intruder in the Old Boy Club of thrones, dominions, principalities, and powers.

The vocabulary we learned in preparation for our work was a language of battle (*We fight not against flesh and blood*), danger (*Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking some one to devour*), and austerity (*Take up your cross and follow me*). After arriving on the job, we find precious few opportunities to use our leadership language. And so, like the two years of Spanish we took in High School, it is soon nonfunctional from nonuse.

Did we learn the wrong language? Did we acquire the wrong images? Did we apprentice ourselves to the wrong master?

### **Grocery prices**

Everybody treats us so nicely. No one seems to think we mean what we say. When we say 'kingdom of God,' no one gets apprehensive, as if we had just announced (which we thought we had) that a powerful army is poised on the border, ready to invade. When we

say radical things like 'Christ', 'love', 'believe', 'peace' and 'sin' – words that in other times and cultures excited martyrdom – the sounds enter the stream of conversation with no more splash than baseball scores and grocery prices. It's hard to maintain a self-concept as a revolutionary when everyone treats us with the same affability they give the grocer.

Are these people right? Is their way of life in no danger from us? Is what we say about God and his ways among us not real in the same way that Vauxhalls and basketball teams and fresh garden spinach are real? Many pastors, realizing the opinion polls overwhelmingly repudiate their self-concept, submit to the cultural verdict and slip into the role of chaplain to the culture. It is easy to do. But some pastors do not; they become subversives in the culture.

### God's spies

Virginia Stem Owens has written the most powerful evocation since *King Lear* of the subversive character of the person (and this certainly includes the pastor) who intends to convert the world by truth and not guns. Her book *And the Trees Clap Their Hands* is a dazzling performance on the parallel bars of anti-gnostic polemic and 'God's spy' intrigue. In the opening pages, Owens, accompanied by her pastor-husband, sets the scene.

We sit in coffee shops and scan faces as they filter by unawares on the sidewalk. We are collecting, sorting, storing the data. But we do not call ourselves scientists; we cannot make controlled experiments. In life there can never be a control group. There is only what is – or what presents itself – at any given moment, for our perusal. And we, with our own limitations, can only be in one place and one time at any moment. For this reason we call ourselves spies, for we must strike a trail and stick to it. We must catch as catch can, life being no laboratory, spreading our senses

wide and drawing them in again to study what we have managed to snare in the wind.

We have several covers, my companion and I. We appear to be busy doing one thing while we are actually watching for signs of the invisible prey, which is our primary occupation. He, for example, balances church budgets, counsels divorcees and delinquents, writes sermons. But beneath it all is a constant watchfulness, a taking note. Even as he stands in the pulpit, he sifts the faces of the congregation for those fine grains, no larger than the dust of pollen, that carry the spoor of the trail he's on.

And I sit among them there, internally knitting them up like Madame Defarge, listening, recording, watching, remembering. Softly. Softly. The clues one must go on are often small and fleeting. A millimeter's widening of the eye, a faint contraction of the nostrils, a silent exhalation, the slight upward modulation of the voice. To spy out the reality hidden in appearances requires vigilance, perseverance. It takes everything I've got.

The kingdom of self is heavily defended territory. Post-Eden Adams and Eves are willing to pay their respects to God, but they don't want him invading their turf. Most sin, far from being a mere lapse of morals or a weak will, is an energetically and expensively erected defence against God. Direct assault in an openly declared war on the god-self is extraordinarily ineffective. Hitting sin head-on is like hitting a nail with a hammer; it only drives it

***Is what we say about God and his ways among us not real in the same way that Vauxhalls and basketball teams and fresh garden spinach are real?***

in deeper. There are occasional exceptions, strategically dictated confrontations, but indirection is the biblically preferred method.

## Jesus the Subversive

Jesus was a master at subversion. Until the very end, everyone, including his disciples, called him Rabbi. Rabbis were important, but they didn't make anything happen. On the occasions when suspicions were aroused that there might be more to him than that title accounted for, Jesus tried to keep it quiet – *Tell no one*.

### Explosions

Jesus' favourite speech form, the parable, was subversive. Parables sound absolutely ordinary: casual stories about soil and seeds, meals and coins and sheep, bandits and victims, farmers and merchants. And they are wholly secular: of his forty or so parables recorded in the Gospels only one has its setting in church, and only a couple mention the name God. As people heard Jesus tell these stories they saw at once that they weren't about God, so there was nothing in them threatening their own sovereignty. They relaxed their defences. They walked away perplexed, wondering what they meant, the stories lodged in their imagination. And then, like a time bomb, they would explode in their unprotected hearts. An abyss opened up at their very feet. He *was* talking about God; they had been invaded!

Jesus continually threw odd stories down alongside ordinary lives (*para*, 'alongside'; *bole*, 'thrown') and walked away without explanation or altar call. Then listeners started seeing connections: God connections, life

connections, eternity connections. The very lack of obviousness, the unlikeness was the stimulus to perceiving likeness: God likeness, life likeness, eternity likeness. But the parable didn't do the work – it put the listener's imagination to work. Parables aren't illustrations that make things easier; they make things harder by requiring the exercise of our imaginations, which if we aren't careful becomes the exercise of our faith.

Parables subversively slip past our defences. Once they're inside the citadel of self we might expect a change of method, a sudden brandishing of bayonets resulting in a palace coup. But it doesn't happen. Our integrity is honoured and preserved. God does not impose his reality from without; he grows flowers and fruit from within. God's truth is not an alien invasion but a loving courtship in which the details of our common lives are treated as seeds in our conception, growth, and maturity in the kingdom. Parables trust our imaginations, which is to say, our faith. They don't herd us paternalistically into a classroom where we get things explained and diagrammed. They don't bully us into regiments where we find ourselves marching in a moral goose step.

There is hardly a detail in the gospel story that was not at the time (and still) overlooked because unlikely, dismissed because commonplace, and rejected because illegal. But under the surface of conventionality and behind the scenes of probability each was effectively inaugurating the kingdom: illegitimate (as was supposed) conception, barnyard birth, Nazareth silence, Galilean secularity, Sabbath healings, Gethsemane prayers, criminal death, baptismal water, eucharistic bread and wine. Subversion.

## The Assumptions of Subversives

Three things are implicit in subversion. One, the status quo is wrong and must be overthrown if the world is going to be livable. It is so deeply wrong that repair work is futile. The world is, in

*As people heard Jesus tell these stories, they saw at once that they weren't about God, so there was nothing in them threatening their own sovereignty...And then, like a time bomb, they would explode in their unprotected hearts*



the word insurance agents use to designate our wrecked cars, a write-off.

Two, there is another world at hand that is livable. Its reality is no chimera. It is in existence, though not visible. Its character is known. The subversive does not operate out of a utopian dream but out of a conviction of the nature of the real world.

Three, the usual means by which one kingdom is thrown out and another put in its place – military force or democratic elections – are not available. If we have neither a preponderance of power nor a majority of votes we begin searching for other ways to effect change. We discover the methods of subversion. We find and welcome allies.

At a sixtieth birthday conversation in 1986, the poet A. R. Ammons was asked, 'Is poetry subversive?' He responded, 'Yes, you have no idea how subversive – deeply subversive. Consciousness often reaches a deeply intense level at the edges of things, questioning and undermining accepted ways of doing things. The audience resists change to the last moment, and then is grateful for it.'

These are the convictions implicit in the gospel. They are not, though, convictions commonly implicit in parish life. More frequently there is the untested assumption that the congregation is close to being the kingdom already and that if we all pull together and try a little harder, it will be. Pastors especially seem to assume that everybody, or at least a majority, in a congregation can be either persuaded or pushed into righteousness and maybe even holiness, in spite of centuries of evidence to the contrary

### Strategies of infiltration

That pastors need an accurate knowledge of Christian doctrine is universally acknowledged; that they need practised skill in the techniques of Christian subversion is a minority conviction. But Jesus is the Way as well as the Truth. The way the gospel is conveyed is as much a part of the kingdom as the truth presented. Why are pastors

experts on the truth and dropouts on the way?

In acquiring familiarity and skill in pastoral subversion, we could do worse than to read spy novels and observe the strategies of communist infiltration, but the biblical passages are more than adequate if we will only pay attention to them:

- *A great and strong wind rent the mountains, and broke in pieces the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice* (1 Kings 19:11-12).
- *This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel: Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord of hosts* (Zech. 4:6).
- *You are the salt of the earth* (Matt. 5:13).
- *The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed which a man took and sowed in his field; it is the smallest of all seeds* (Matt. 13:31-32).
- *For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in much fear and trembling* (1 Cor. 2:2-3).

Unfortunately this unbroken biblical methodology of subversion is easily and frequently discarded by pastors in favour of assault or promotion. There are two likely reasons: vanity and naïveté.

### Vanity

We don't like being wallflowers at the world's party. A recent study of the decline in white males' preparing for pastoral work concluded that a major reason is that there's no prestige left in the job. Interestingly, the slack is taken up by others (blacks, Asians, women), who apparently are not looking for prestige and have a history of working subversively. Neither was there prestige in Paul's itinerant tent-making.

### Naïveté

We think the church is already the kingdom of God and, if only better

organized and motivated, can conquer the world. But nowhere in Scripture or history do we see a church synonymous with the kingdom of God. The church in many instances is more worldly than the world. When we equate the church and the kingdom and the identity turns out to be false, we feel 'taken in.' Little wonder that anger and cynicism are epidemic behind the smiling veneer of American pastors. We need refresher courses in Barthian critiques of religion and Dantean analyses of sin, especially spiritual sin.

## Tools of Subversion

Prayer and parable are the stock-in-trade tools of the subversive pastor. The quiet (or noisy) closet life of prayer enters into partnership with the Spirit that strives still with every human heart, a wrestling match in holiness. And parables are the consciousness-altering words that slip past falsifying platitude and invade the human spirit with Christ-truth.

This is our primary work in the real world. But we need continual convincing. The people for whom we are praying and among whom we are telling parables are seduced into supposing that their money and ambition are making the world turn on its axis. There are so many of them and so few of us, making it difficult to maintain our convictions. It is easy to be seduced along with them.

Words are the real work of the world – prayer words with God, parable words with men and women. The behind-the-scenes work of creativity by word and sacrament, by parable and prayer, subverts the seduced world. The pastor's real work is what Ivan Illich calls 'shadow work' – the work nobody gets paid for and few notice but that makes a world of salvation: meaning and value and purpose, a world of love and hope and faith – in short, the kingdom of God.

From *The Gift, Reflections on Christian Ministry* (Marshall Pickering, London, 1995), used by permission.



## Ann Allen meets Andy McGowan

*En Route from Dingwall to Korea (where else!) via Uddingston, Andrew McGowan, BD STM PHD, found time to drop in to our manse for coffee and a chat.*

**Ann: When you were growing up in Uddingston, Andrew, I can't imagine you ever envisaged one day being the globetrotting principal of a theological college?**

Andrew: Hardly. Strangely I did feel an overwhelming sense of God calling me to be a minister when I was just 14 and not even converted. I was horrified at the thought, as ministry held no appeal for me whatsoever and yet within the year I had experienced new birth through the preaching of a Northern Ireland evangelist, Hedley Murphy, at a local Brethren meeting. That earlier call then fell into place and from the age of 14 I knew I was destined for the Ministry of the word.

**Ann: Your preparation for ministry was a fairly mixed experience wasn't it?**

Andrew: Indeed it was. Aberdeen for my B.D. was followed by a year at Union Theological Seminary, New York, hardly the place to foster evangelical roots. It was a mixture of fun, enjoyment and depression... a learning experience in every way. Union was as liberal as it gets but it did have a wonderful library, the largest in the theological world at that time.

**Ann: How much of it did you manage to read, Andy?**

Andrew: Not quite all! But my reading of *The Defense of the Faith* by Cornelius van Till and a subsequent conversation I had with the author was a seminal point in crystallising my theology and defining my views.

**Ann: That's interesting because I think for many people you are seen primarily as a "defender of the reformed faith". Does that perception fit well do you think?**

Andrew: I would see every Christian as both a defender and proclaimer of the faith but my forays in presbytery and General Assembly over the years have generally been battles carefully chosen on fundamental issues such as the authority of Scripture.

**Ann: Evangelicalism has become such a "broad church" these days that for many people, lay and clergy, I think the issue of the authority of scripture has become somewhat hazy and ill defined.**

Andrew: I agree. There is a lack of clarity on that most important doctrine. In the past evangelicals have been simplistic and have ignored the difficult questions. I am currently writing a

book, a kind of critique of various views. The word of God is amazingly diverse in origin and content and genre, and issues of translation and version and text need to be dealt with, with honesty and integrity, to strengthen the reformed position. In recent years that has been happening under the leadership of men like Don Carson.

**Ann: All this seems a million miles away from the daily reality of ordinary parish ministry as experienced by most folk. You have served in Mallaig and the Small Isles, Aberdeen and Bishopbriggs as parish minister. How did your intense interest in doctrine and theology fit that profile?**

Andrew: Very comfortably. My view from scripture is that there are two offices: that of elder and deacon. I see myself as preaching, teaching elder with no more authority than any other elder, just a different specific function. As a parish minister I had an elder's district, I did not feel I had necessarily to chair the Kirk Session or that I had specific gifts of leadership in that area. I wanted the eldership as a whole to be liberated to preach, teach and baptise, and administer communion where appropriate. The church today has a huge resource in its elders and needs to release them into ministry.

**Ann: That echoes much of the present thinking stimulated by the projected dearth of full time ministers for the future. But while in parish ministry you became involved with Glasgow Bible College, acting ultimately as secretary to the Governors. Was that instrumental in leading you to your present position as Principal of Highland Theological College?**

Andrew: While involved with GBC I read in the media that a highly innovative, non traditional federal university was to be established in the Highlands and Islands. It seemed to me to present

a unique opportunity to establish an independent theological college which would guarantee the christian integrity of the institution while being part of a Scottish academic institution with high academic standards. The choice at that time for folk was between evangelical Bible college and theological faculty where few academic staff were committed to evangelical beliefs and many were openly hostile and even agnostic and atheistic.

My vision was to combine the best of both these worlds in a new theological college.

**Ann: So a revolutionary vision for Scotland in 1992. How did that become the present day reality that is Highland Theological College?**

Andrew: It's a remarkable story really. I shared my vision with the Rev Alexander Murray, an APC minister and Highland Councillor who was pressing the case for a new university of the Highlands. He and I worked together for 6 months. I wrote a visionary paper, setting out the argument, he networked with interested individuals. We agreed to put the plan forward to around 15 individuals and if they were enthused we would proceed on the understanding that this was of God; if they were not in agreement then we would walk away from the whole idea. They agreed and formed a steering group and the vision began to take on flesh.

**Ann: Embryonic ideas come with a whole set of difficulties. Starting from a paper how difficult was it to launch a college?**

Andrew: 1993/94 was a very hard year. We had a 5 year plan to launch in 1998 but Dr Robert Chalmers, Principal of Moray College, Elgin offered space, a window of opportunity and challenged us to start in faith!

In 1995 I was appointed as Director with Hector Morrison as Deputy. We prayed for 10 students initially, offering them the Cambridge diploma in Religious Studies, and we opened in

September of that year with 11 students enrolled. We'd begun.

**Ann: Since that small beginning you have moved premises, enrolled 200 students, 40 of whom are full time, and are in the process of employing a full complement of 14 staff. For someone who feels he does not have gifts of leadership that seems to me a formidable accomplishment!**

Andrew: You must remember I have had a working partnership with Hector Morrison throughout which has been so influential. I tend to be the ideas man and can rush on like a bull at a gate. Hector is the canny partner who works out the detail and gives the balance.

**Ann: Remarkably you have real street cred now for academic standards as well as being marked as a thoroughly reformed theologically sound institution.**

Andrew: Yes. We are the first faculty / college in UHI to have our honours degree validated by the Open University, and of course all our staff are trained to teach on line, to video conference, to use web based format, and we make full use of the IT on which UHI depends.

**Ann: When the history books are written, Andy, what would you like to read about the contribution of HTC to Scotland?**

Andrew: I would hope that the college would help to revitalise a biblical christianity and a reformed theology in Scotland today. My deep concern for my own denomination is that when we reject the authority of scripture we ultimately have nothing to offer people other than to be good and kind. There is no life transforming message and the church dies. But I am not entirely pessimistic. The fastest growing churches in the world are those who have held fast to their reformed tradition. I have an international role as

Vice President of the World Reformed Fellowship and would like to draw together the strengths of those committed to the reformed faith.

**Ann: Are you talking about politicising the role of reformed evangelicals in Scotland?**

Andrew: I would be interested in helping those of reformed calvinistic conviction to make an impact on the denomination and country.

**Ann: Does that mean that the days of “quiet infiltration” are past?!**

Andrew: I have never been a “quiet infiltrator”. I see that as the role of liberals who have denied in practice the Confession of Faith I accepted on ordination. I see enormous value in the work of Crieff Fellowship and the broad focus of Forward Together.

I'm 48 now. Life is too short to squander. My focus would be on encouraging a distinctive group, however small, to be influential in writing, speaking and engaging in debate at local and national level to promote commitment to reformed evangelicalism. That could I believe have hugely beneficial repercussions for the church in Scotland.

**Ann: What next then Andrew? The possibilities are exciting!**

Andrew: HTC is my life's work now. I plan to be there till retirement unless they kick me out. There is still a lot to do. The plant is in place, the staff team finalised in September. Courses and academic quality assurance is in place. Interesting links are being made with places as diverse as Aberdeen and Korea. The next issue is to establish the college on a firm financial footing for the long term.

**Ann: Andrew McGowan, principal of HTC, local preacher and elder, is being used of God in remarkable ways. The story is far from finished. Watch this space.**

### **The Barthian Revolt in Modern Theology**

Gary Dorrien,  
Westminster John Knox Press,  
Louisville, Kentucky 2000  
ISBN 0 664 22151 3

The renaissance in Barth scholarship continues apace with the arrival of yet another fine exposition and assessment of his theological achievement. Dorrien traces the development of Barth's thought along the usual track, from his break with liberalism in Romans, to his dogmatic 'turn', and on into his mature theological output. But Dorrien's analysis is the fruit of much patient working through Barth's German context, and he brings a freshness of insight to this journey.

He excels in his account of Barth's dialectics, his gradual breach with Kutter and Bultmann who had so applauded Romans. Brunner's suspicion that Barth was drifting into dogmatism, becoming a fundamentalist of the ancient doctrine, is finely drawn out, as is Barth's response that he is seeking to attend to the Word of God. The degree to which Barth used the logic of Hermann, while rooting it in a new source, is another example of the light Dorrien sheds on his topic.

But this book is not to be taken as just a history of thought. Dorrien appraises the subtleties of theology clearly and helpfully. His assessment of Barth's threefold doctrine of revelation deserves our thanks. He picks out carefully the interconnection of the threefold forms of revelation and shows that the presence of divine revelation for Barth depends on its being actually 'preached' in the widest sense. The role of the Holy Spirit is vital to this event, more so than many commentators have acknowledged. Barth had parted company with the liberals for their historicizing of revelation through human aspiration. He had criticized Protestant scholasticism for historicizing revelation as the fixed printed words on the page. His own new synthesis sought to ensure that the Scriptural text and contemporary preaching combined, under the Spirit's

### **Book Reviews**

working, to bring the divine revelation into the now.

Dorrien's model clarity similarly takes us into the Barth-Harnack debate about what theology is. Harnack consigns it to a scientific critical study of doctrine from the past. Barth wishes to make it an enterprise of the present, a servant of 'preaching': negatively testing this against Scripture, positively a reflection on the gospel as it is given to us. 'The Word is made present not by describing the preacher's psychological experiences or his or her ideas about the national soul, but by preaching scriptural teaching in the fullness of its witness, where God the Holy Spirit bears witness to himself.' Such is Dorrien's summary.

The chapter on Barth's contemporary critics, from Tillich and Niebuhr to Bonhoeffer, also provides excellent material and high quality analysis in very readable form. Dorrien's final chapter gives a mature and sensible assessment of Barth. He defends him from the charge of revelational positivism 'because he did not appeal to church-established dogmas of revelation prior to or apart from his exegesis of the inscripturated word.' He made a mistake in not showing more clearly his difference with Calvin and Paul over some limited natural theology. Dorrien justly concludes his fine study, complementing others recently contributed by McCormack and Webster, by saying 'Barth's theology remained a dialectics of the open Word'.

*Timothy Bradshaw, Regents Park  
College, Oxford*

## Book reviews

### **Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture**

Graeme Goldsworthy

IVP, Leicester, 2000, 272pp, £11.99

ISBN 0 85111 539 X

John Chapman, in his Foreword, tells us that he has unbelieving friends who will, from time to time, come to church with him. When they do he says that it doesn't seem unreasonable for him to hope that they will hear the gospel, "they ought at least to have the opportunity to hear what we are really on about". Graeme Goldsworthy's plea is for sermons that testify to Christ. Why does this need saying? Because there are Christian preachers who are not preaching Christ. They may be preaching law, they may be preaching morality, but they are not preaching Christ.

Goldsworthy wants us to take the Emmaus experience seriously. Jesus explained to the puzzled disciples "what was said in all the scriptures concerning himself." This should be the key to every sermon. All the scriptures point us to Christ. Dividing the book in two, Goldsworthy first sets out his reasoning which is grounded in biblical theology, defined as "nothing more or less than allowing the Bible to speak as a whole, as the one word of the one God about the one way of salvation." In part two he applies his method to the various genre of Biblical literature, Old and New Testament.

I found this a dull and irritating book. Goldsworthy's style is dry and dense. He takes for ever to make a simple point. And I find myself wondering if my preaching is to be directed by the Emmaus principle or by the text in front of me. Reviewing my own sermons on Genesis 1 (six of them) I note that one of them is an out-and-out gospel sermon, two of them climax with Christ, and three hardly mention him at all. This is because there are such rich seams to excavate that one sermon isn't enough for the one chapter. Six sermons enabled me to explore

different themes (such as the fallacy of evolution) and give them the full attention they deserve. Having said that, the reader need not fear that he may have wandered into Caldercruix synagogue. The hymns and prayers are always Christo-centric. And surely this is the nub of the matter: that our worship, taken as a whole, is centred on Christ.

*Ian M Watson, Caldercruix*

### **Discovering Mark's Gospel (Crossway Bible Guide)**

David Hewitt

Crossway Books, Leicester, 2000, 185pp, £4.99

ISBN 1 85684 201 0

This very helpful and accessible little book is in the form of a series of studies, working through the text of Mark's Gospel. It is designed to be used for personal study, or in groups, and is one of a series under the title "Crossway Bible Guides" (editors, Ian Coffey and Stephen Gaukroger).

The text is divided into 14 sections, with each of these sub-divided into between 2 and 8 individual studies. Each study ends with three questions for reflection and discussion. Several suggestions are given for 6-10 week courses of study, covering selected passages in a topical, rather than a consecutive manner.

The comments are generally fresh and clear, and strike a very good balance between helpfulness and brevity. They provide illuminating background information and set each passage within its wider context.

Extra sections, through the text, entitled "Digging Deeper" and "Important Doctrines" give fuller background information on particular topics and set other issues more fully in a wider biblical context.

This book could be used very helpfully as a basis for group Bible study, although it would probably be necessary for the group leader to supplement the questions given. There are, of course, many other studies available published, specifically for this purpose, some of high quality. One

advantage of this book is that it provides 61 studies for £5!

The greatest usefulness for this book, however, may well be for personal Bible study, especially daily Bible reading. The comments illuminate the text without getting in the way, and the questions, especially the first in each study are very helpful in this regard. This reviewer also expects to find some of the book's fresh insights helpful when preparing to preach on Mark!

Overall this book could be most useful in a variety of contexts to help and encourage ordinary Christians to study the bible and apply it to their lives. As such it has to be highly commended.

*Robert Kane, Newtownstewart Co Tyrone*

### **Human Cloning – When Science Fiction Becomes Reality**

Lane Lester with James Hefley

Marshall Pickering, 1999, 170pp, £8.99

ISBN 0 551 03213 8

Human cloning, is it possible? Yes it is. Is it likely? Yes it is. Is it a concern of ours?... Is our considered response ready?...

Surely one of the great moral issues of our time is the cloning of a human being. It has to be our concern and all the more so when according to Professor Lane Lester (Professor of Biology at Emmanuel College, Franklin Springs, Georgia) the leading research scientists in the genetic field are admitted atheists or agnostics.

How will we, the church, deal with the issues? Will clones be made in God's image and likeness? What would our response be to a cloned individual seeking membership within the church? Will they have eternal souls? Will God hold them responsible for their sins? Will the parents of clones bear responsibility too? What will happen to our concept of uniqueness and individuality? Will donors and their clones suffer identity crisis as a result of bearing the same genes? Will cloning destroy the two-parent family? Will the Christian community condemn cloning as a mockery of God's will for humanity? These questions and more

are raised and responses offered for consideration.

Although a book about a scientific subject, with the aid of Dr James Hefley, (adjunct professor, writer and lecturer in mass communications), it remains open to the careful reader with little or no scientific background. And again, although aimed at American readership, the questions raised are of universal concern.

The book is both informative and interesting and well prepares us for the debates to come with useful pointers such as, "Cloning is not creating new life but simply reproducing life in a novel way". Here is a scientist who knows his subject *and* his Bible and brings the two together for the benefit of us all.

Bob Gehrke, Glasgow

#### **Whitewashed Stairs to Heaven - Maureen McKenna and the Open Door Trust Glasgow**

Maureen McKenna with Irene Howat  
Christian Focus Publications  
ISBN 1 85792 616 1

When a friend gave me a copy of Maureen McKenna's book on the story of "The Open Doors Trust Glasgow" I was prepared to be disappointed. I have read so many books where Christian writers tell moving and exciting biographies in the dulllest way possible as if conspiring to make what was thrilling into something unbelievably boring with leaden prose, full of clichés and overstocked with anecdotes.

Not so *White washed stairs to heaven*. Maureen McKenna describes her early life in a Glasgow tenement, deprived of most of life's material comforts, in a way today's poverty comes nowhere near. It is a delightfully honest story painted with a few strokes. But it is hard life and Maureen suffers many knocks. She pulls herself up through her own determined spirit, but one blow becomes one blow too many and even alcohol "*her new friend*" can no longer shield her from the pain. She tries to take her own life by throwing herself under a bus but is saved quite literally by invisible hands at the

kerbside. She comes wonderfully to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, whose hands had saved her, and begins with her husband Hugh the astonishing, riveting and harrowing work with the prostitutes, addicts, homeless and the out-of-sight no-hopers on the underbelly of our society, who make up the subject of the book.

We are drawn into the life and work of these two saints and feel with them the unbelievable sorrow for the people they come across. We are introduced to a sweet girl with sparkling eyes, we even feel we know her, when we learn that two weeks later her body is found in a railway station toilet. The story is told with such breathtaking frankness and honesty and without being at all sensational or prurient. It is challenging stuff and not for the fainthearted. There are times when it all becomes too much. "*Sometimes I feel*" says Maureen, "*that I am trying to mop up a whole sea of sadness and hurt with a paper handkerchief*". What is most striking about the story is the way that the work never seems to lose its Biblical focus nor its evangelical zeal as others have done. This on its own marks it out and makes it worthy of note and the book worthy of a read.

Crawford Mackenzie

#### **The Inclusive Language Debate: A Plea for Realism**

Don A Carson.

IVP, Leicester, 1998, 221 pp, £9.99.  
ISBN 0 85111 584 5

In this book on Bible translation Professor Carson attempts to explain some of the complex issues surrounding translation generally and specifically the use of "inclusive" language. It was written in the context of a controversy about the production of the NIVI (New International Version: Inclusive Language Edition) which took place in the late 1990s in the USA. The Committee on Bible Translation ('CBT') produced a revised version of the NIV which in many cases removed masculine ('sexist') language from the NIV. This was seen by some as the (negative) result of feminist influence and a 'neutering of the Word of God'. In

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response a set of guidelines were produced at Colorado Springs (the 'CSG') which sought to 'protect' the Bible. Both sets of translation principles are reproduced as chapter 2.

The next two chapters are possibly the most important in the book. In chapter 3 Carson seeks "to set out some of the basic principles of linguistics and translation" (p74) and in the fourth chapter he discusses the nature of grammatical gender. Carson manages to keep these chapters fairly non-technical, though the non-specialist will still need to concentrate!

The next chapters seek to evaluate the two sets of translation guidelines (ch. 5) and to look at specific examples from the OT (ch. 6), the NT (ch. 7) and some of the critical passages where doctrinal matters are more directly at stake (ch. 8). Then Carson looks at the issue of whether the English language really is changing as the CBT assumes (ch. 9) and concludes with half a dozen pastoral observations (ch. 10).

There are two key questions in this debate. Firstly, the technical one of how the gender systems of Hebrew/Greek relate to English (dealt with in chapters 3-4) and secondly whether the English language is changing (chapter 9). The first of these two issues is dealt with very well. Carson shows the complexities of grammatical gender and the consequent caution that needs to be exercised. Regarding the second (and more controversial) issue Carson believes that in many places and sub-cultures language has changed, and for this reason argues for a moderate use of gender inclusive language. He is by no means happy with all the changes in the NIVI and it is a great merit of the book that it deals so consistently with the details and does not resort to vague (and polemical) generalisations.

Readers must decide for themselves whether the language use of their congregations might move them to use

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inclusive language texts in at least some contexts (Carson says that he would not use non-inclusive language in a university mission). It may be appropriate in some city communities though perhaps not in rural ones.

This is an excellent book on Bible translation which is marked by firm courtesy and deep knowledge of linguistics and the Biblical languages.

*J.K. Palmer, Selwyn, Cambridge.*

### Jesus Christ or Mohammed?

F. S. Coplestone

Christian Focus, Fearn, 2000, 160 pp.  
£4.99

ISBN 1 85792 588 2

This is a small book which sets out to deal with the major discussion points between Muslims and Christians. Jem Trehearn has produced an updated and expanded version of some chapters of the original book by this Welsh preacher and lecturer.

The early chapters deal with the Qur'anic texts relating to the doctrine of God, salvation, Christ and the Scriptures and in the second half of the book there is a summary of the claims of Christ, the meaning of the Trinity and the witness of the Apostles to Christ. A helpful feature of the book is the wide scope of discussion points, the many quotations from the Qur'an, and the wealth of Biblical references. Much of the material is in note form and there are a number of useful lists.

The attempt to cover so much material can lead to frustration, and the book needs supplementing at many points, so that the reader will often want to refer to more recent publications.

What would a sympathetic Moslem friend make of a book like this? With this question in mind I encountered two problems. First of all I could have wished for a different title to the book. As several writers have pointed out the comparison is not between Christ and Mohammed, the Qur'an and the Bible, but in Colin Chapman's words,

"the Qur'an is to Muslims what Jesus is to Christians." Secondly a Muslim friend could find the opening paragraphs confrontational. In setting a test for true religion the author seems to argue from the point he wants to prove, and this detracts from the very powerful points he makes about the Law of Love. Nevertheless this slim book provides valuable material for discussion with Muslim friends and it sharpens our own awareness of the main points of theological difference between Islam and Christian faith.

*Brian S Ringrose, Edinburgh*

### A Voice in the Night

Brenda Sloggett

Christian Focus, 2000, 253pp, £5.99  
ISBN 1 85792 577 7

*A Voice in the Night* is an autobiographical account of a housewife and mother whose life was transformed by her willingness to listen to the Lord and to be led by him.

The first chapters of the book are devoted to Brenda Sloggett's early life, spent in the Exclusive Brethren church. Although clearly there were difficulties, her recollections are fair and gracious and she is firm in the belief that God used her experiences and the loss of contact with her family to prepare her for the work that lay ahead.

Challenged by scripture, most notably James 2 v 14-17 and Isaiah 58 v 6-11, Brenda became involved in the work of The British Refugee Council working in tandem with Southeast Asian Outreach to resettle Vietnamese and Cambodian refugees. Lovingly supported by her husband and daughters, Brenda opened up her home and her life to foster children from Vietnam, Cambodia and Burma.

Brenda's work mushroomed rapidly, leading her to undertake numerous risky visits to the Far East offering encouragement and, where possible, practical support. The logistics of such trips left me, also a housewife, in awe. From negotiating with hostile embassies and customs officials, organising travel, taxis and accommodation in an alien and often threatening environment, to the unhygienic conditions

and resident cockroaches, Brenda coped with them all with a calm assurance and a steadfast faith in a God who provides for all our needs.

The most thrilling part of this book, though, is to see how God is working in the poorest and most hostile nations of the Far East. The faith and joy of these oppressed Christians is both heart-warming and humbling yet their need is great. Brenda Sloggett simply yet graphically describes the situation of these heroic Christians who live under constant duress. Many of us in the West remain oblivious to their plight.

This book is not a literary masterpiece; it is a simple, straightforward narrative. It is however, a clarion call to all those who can and will work for the Lord, either in an active capacity or in a supporting role like her family.

*Eileen McDowell, Bangor*

### Ungodly Fear

Stephen Parsons

Lion Publishing, Oxford, 2000, 320pp,  
£18.00

ISBN 0 7459 4288 1

Stephen Parsons is Vicar of Lechlade in Gloucestershire and is the author of two books on the theme of health and healing in the church. In this volume, which bears the sub title 'Fundamentalist Christianity and the Abuse of Power', he writes out of his experience of meeting victims of such abuse. He relates five stories involving four individuals and one married couple, examines the Waco 'cult' which ended in tragedy in 1993, and comments on each case. Acknowledging that the abuse of power is found in all aspects of society and is an issue throughout the whole church, he confines himself to that form of Christianity he describes as charismatic / fundamentalist.

Fundamentalism, which is defined as a distinctive mindset rather than a doctrine, along with evangelicalism, the charismatic, Faith and shepherding movements, are all examined against the background of the potential of ideologies and belief systems to devalue and oppress individuals. After discussing various models in seeking to



understand fundamentalism, he concludes by reflecting on the attitude of Jesus to power and those who abuse it, demonstrating that He would undoubtedly have sided with the victims.

While many might not totally agree with the author's psychological analysis or his attitude to Scripture, his sincere concern for the victims of such abuse and for the integrity of the Church's witness in a critical and scornful world are not in doubt. He consistently argues that the Church should be a family where people find love, forgiveness and security. Church leaders should be motivated by service, and ought never to use power and position for selfish gratification.

This is a disturbing book which should be read by all in positions of leadership and responsibility in the Church and who seek to understand good and bad practice in the context of congregational life.

*John W Lockington, Larne*

### **Intelligent Design**

William A Dembski

IVP, Illinois, 1999, 302pp, \$19.99

ISBN 08308 1581 3

'Posterity will marvel that so very flimsy and dubious a hypothesis could be accepted with the incredible credulity that it has'. These words of Malcolm Muggeridge are quoted approvingly by William Dembski (p.121) in this book which is at once baffling in its complexity and exciting in its engagement with the issues of our day, in particular the naturalism which he describes as part of the air we all breathe (p.103).

*Intelligent Design* consists of three parts. It begins with three heavy chapters on the historical backdrop to the subject; Dembski then seeks to construct a theory of design ('specified complexity' - a term which couldn't be unpacked in a short review like this - even if one were capable of unpacking it!); and in the third part seeks to build a bridge between science and theology. Dembski has degrees in psychology and theology and Ph.D.s in mathematics and philosophy.

He argues that it was Darwin's expulsion of design from biology that made possible the triumph of naturalism in Western culture, and that it will be the reinstatement of design that will be its undoing (p.14).

The scientist faces the mystery of existence: 'Why is the world ordered and whence cometh this order?' (p.98) Naturalism is described as 'the intellectual pathology of our age. It artificially constricts the life of the mind and shuts down inquiry into the transcendent. ... Naturalism is the disease. Intelligent design is the cure' (p.120).

Dembski argues, in considerable detail and with many involved illustrations, that the design of the universe points to a Designer.

*Intelligent Design* could be described as a demanding book, a challenging book and an exciting book. It is demanding in that it taxes the mind, especially of readers unversed in biology and mathematics. If it is true, as one commendation says, that Dembski has 'taken the key concepts from his seminal but highly technical work *The Design Inference* and made them accessible to the average reader' then that reviewer has a different definition of 'average reader' from mine! The book is not a light read. It (p.213) quotes approvingly Einstein's remark that everything should be made as simple as possible - but not simpler.

The book is, secondly, a challenging book, in its summons to rigorous thinking and engagement with today's intellectuals ('...the just-so stories of Richard Dawkins will not do', p.182). It is a stimulating book, and might well be commended to (say) students and teachers of biology and science, perhaps especially any such on the fringes of the community of faith, not to mention those right outside it.

*Intelligent Design* is also challenging in that it squarely faces up to the Darwinism which, 'despite being so inadequately supported as a scientific theory, continues to garner the full support of the academic establishment'; Dembski suggests that there is a scientific political correctness, noting (p.117) that in America 50% of people

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polled (by Gallup) said they are creationists, 40% believe in some form of God-guided evolution; only 10% are full-blooded Darwinists - yet that 10% controls the academy.

The third thing is that *Intelligent Design* is also an exciting book. So this reviewer has found, though his mind has been left reeling at times. It reminded me of C. S. Lewis' words (in *Fern-seeds and Elephants*, p.34):

'To be ignorant and simple now - not to be able to meet the enemies on their own ground - would be to throw down our weapons, and to betray our uneducated brethren who have, under God, no defence but us against the intellectual attacks of the heathen'. It is exciting to see Dembski's challenge to the dogmatic exclusion of design from science, by which scientists are themselves stifling scientific inquiry (p.125) and his assertion, 'Reinstating design within science can only enrich science'.

The evidence in the world around us points to the conclusion that there is 'intelligent design' at work. Dembski suggests to us that the possibilities (in this intelligent design movement, of which the author is himself a leading exponent) for transforming the intellectual life of our culture are immense.

*David J Randall, Macduff*

### **The Message of Matthew—The Bible Speaks Today**

Michael Green

IVP, Leicester, 2000, 345pp, £9.99

ISBN 0 85111 536 5

*The Bible Speaks Today* series of New Testament expositions is undoubtedly well-known and much appreciated by RJCM readers, and this volume on Matthew (which completes the NT series) by Michael Green will not disappoint. Those who are familiar with Green's previous works may remember his 1988 commentary *Matthew for Today*. *The Message of Matthew* is an updated version of that work. Part of the update is a 19-page study guide

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that will be very helpful for those using the book in a group Bible study (or other setting).

Green tells the reader that he 'became thrilled with this Gospel some years ago' (p.11), and that excitement is clearly evident throughout his lively interpretation. In a densely packed introduction he prepares the reader for his quickly paced exposition by explaining the situation faced by the original readers and outlining the literary plan of the Gospel. In brief, Matthew's Gospel was written to be 'a tool for the Christian scribe (teacher)' (p.28) seeking to explain how members of the Christian assembly should live, and to answer taunts that Christians are enemies of the Law, Judaism, and the people of Israel. Green's account mirrors Matthew's purpose nicely in that it enables today's Christian teachers and pastors to teach contemporary believers. He follows the detailed thesis of Elizabeth and Ian Billingham *The Structure of Matthew's Gospel* to describe the literary plan of the Gospel. Chapters 1-13 revolve around the theme of discipleship, contrasting the Pharisees' rejection of Jesus with the disciples' acceptance. Chapters 14-28 revolve around the theme of judgment, contrasting human judgment of Israel's Messiah with the final judgment of humanity. Green's skilful use of this outline illuminates the Gospel message nicely and enables his exposition to move quickly and easily, engaging the reader throughout.

Pastors and teachers should definitely consider using *The Message of Matthew* when preaching or teaching this Gospel. It combines sound scholarship with down-to-earth practicality and readability.

*Robert Keay, St Andrews*

### **Ruth: Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching**

Katharine Doob Sakenfeld

John Knox Press, Louisville, 1999, 91pp, Price not stated ISBN 0-8042-3149-4

This slim commentary has a 16 page introduction in which the familiar topics of date, purpose and authorship are briefly dealt with. Also discussed are the canonical context and the more interesting matters of the traditions and customs underlying the story, such as Levirate marriage. Three theological themes are also outlined, namely, 'The Peaceable Community', 'Examples of Loyal Living', and 'The Place of God in the Story'.

The commentary proper is divided into four sections corresponding to the four chapters of the Book of Ruth, and leans towards the technical approach rather than the devotional, though its style is far from forbidding and would be accessible to most readers.

The commentary concludes with an hermeneutical and theological postscript followed by a two-and-a-half page bibliography.

The author writes from a liberal feminist perspective and this perspective frequently obtrudes throughout the book. In her preface the author refers to the book of Ruth as a 'key text in Euro-American discussions of feminist biblical hermeneutics' and also as 'my entry point for cross-cultural sharing of feminist Christian reflection'.

It is not surprising, therefore, that a possible lesbian relationship between Ruth and Naomi is alluded to, and that the possibility of a sexual liaison between Ruth and Boaz on the threshing floor is discussed.

However, once that bias is recognized and taken into account the reader will find that there are many acute observations and interesting suggestions in the commentary.

As the title of the series indicates, this book is intended for teachers and preachers. Christians who seek devotional content and food for their souls should look elsewhere.

*Stanley Jebb, Truro.*

### **Joshua, Judges, Ruth – New International Biblical Commentary**

J Harris, C Brown & M Moore  
Paternoster. Carlisle. 2000, 398pp,  
ISBN 0 85364 726 7

The foreward to this series of commentaries states the guiding principle of the work is *believing criticism*, an approach which 'marries probing, reflective interpretation of the text to loyal biblical devotion and warm Christian affection.' (p.X.). That sounds like my kind of commentary!

There are three commentaries in this volume (based on NIV translation) which in turn are faithful to the goal of the series. Each begins with an introduction, which engages with the chief controversial critical issues, such as the dating of the canonical books. But Harris, Brown and Moore do not leave us floundering in the morass of critical doubt. Having cited the critics they proceed on the basis of respecting the integrity and authority of the Biblical text.

Each of the chapters is short and easily accessible. Technical matters and details of further reading are not placed in the body of the text but confined to 'additional notes' at the end of each chapter, making for an enjoyable read. Important themes or relevant topics are discussed in greater depth by way of several excursions such as 'Holy War in Israel' and 'Yahweh, God of Grace'. Where Hebrew words are cited they are transliterated into English, though only Harris refrains from many such references.

This is a work which would be of great value not only to preachers, but also to any one who wanted to study Joshua, Judges and Ruth in their daily devotions or for leadership of Bible studies and home groups. It does not content itself with discussion of the text, but aims to communicate something for the Christian to learn or apply to their lives. Not everyone may agree with all that is said here, but more than enough good material to commend it warmly.

*David Moore, Cootehill, Co. Cavan*